



To: Toronto Public Library Board – May 28, 2001

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Service Harmonization Update**

Purpose:

To provide the Toronto Public Library Board with an update and to indicate next steps in service harmonization.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

Not applicable.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive the *Service Harmonization Update* report for information.

Background:

Reports on specific service harmonization initiatives have been provided periodically to the Toronto Public Library Board. This report provides information to the Board concerning the next steps in service harmonization.

Comments:

Since the amalgamation of the seven predecessor municipal library boards in 1998, significant progress has been achieved in harmonizing service across the entire library system. Key initiatives have included activities such as the allocation of library materials budget, Sunday hours, implementation of a single integrated library system, review of non-branch services, including bookmobile, adult literacy and home library services, children's services such as homework clubs, leading-to-reading, etc.

Staffing

The staffing of libraries is a service harmonization issue because staffing, like collections, is a major determinant of the range and quality of services offered in any branch. Since

amalgamation, there has been some movement of staff between branches to address service requirements. However, there has not been an assessment of staffing levels across the regions.

The current regional differences arise, in large measure, out of the varying ways in which service delivery was organized in the predecessor library systems. In suburban areas, libraries are organized according to tiers of service, with staff concentrated in district libraries which supply relief staff, as required, to the neighbourhood branches in their area. In the older municipalities, resources were distributed more evenly, and branches staffed to be more self-sufficient although staff do move between branches as the need arises.

A task group is now assessing staffing levels. Several key components have been identified. The first component recognizes the basic staffing required to operate a branch library for a given number of hours per week. The second component assesses the performance of comparable branches and provides additional staffing for those branches which are most heavily used. The third component is a "local needs" factor which allows each region to assign a small portion of the total regional allocation to those branches where local factors, such as user needs or branch layout, necessitate additional staffing. Another consideration is the hours of work provisions of the collective agreement. Relevant issues will be discussed with the Union.

Branch Hours

Although the development of electronic service delivery has made it possible for many people to access certain library services twenty-four hours per day/seven days per week, the open hours of one's library of choice continue to be an important measure of accessibility. A significant step toward service harmonization was achieved through the extension of Sunday service to all areas of Toronto. Considerable variation does remain, however, in the open hours of branches in various areas of the city.

The variation in open hours is partly attributable to the way in which service delivery was developed in the suburbs and the city. The suburban model concentrates resources in district libraries which generally are open longer hours than the neighbourhood branches. In the older municipalities, there are many more neighbourhood libraries, open longer hours, but fewer libraries equivalent to the district libraries.

Addressing the differences in open hours, and their impact on service equity, is a further step in harmonizing services. Although some work was done previously in this area, further work is needed in developing a model that can address service harmonization.

In reviewing open hours, libraries will be reviewed by service tier - neighbourhood, district and research and reference - and further categorized based on use. The distribution of open hours suggested by the model will almost certainly be different from what currently exists. Presently, the variation is not so much at the extremes - with a few exceptions, the largest and most heavily-used libraries are open the longest hours; the smallest, least heavily-used libraries tend to be open the fewest hours. There is, however, great variation in the middle. In some instances, branches which service communities of comparable size and are equally well-used differ by as much as 20 open hours per week.

Harmonizing hours within the existing funding envelope would involve increasing service to one community at the expense of another. Our experience since amalgamation has demonstrated the inherent difficulties in removing existing services from local communities. When options for service hours are brought forward for the Board's consideration, all of these factors will need to be carefully assessed.

Conclusion:

Staff will continue to work toward the harmonization of staffing and develop a branch hours model for future consideration by the Board.

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Not applicable.