

The Toronto Public Library Service Harmonization Initiatives

Service Delivery Model

A service delivery model was developed to provide a benchmark for evaluating, harmonizing and developing library services. The model is a tiered structure that encompasses all of the 98 branches as well as the non-branch services. The model was built on existing infrastructure and library planning principles widely accepted in public libraries and in use to varying degrees in all of the predecessor boards. It provides a dynamic continuum of service delivery. Each branch is an entry point into the entire branch network and the services of the entire library system, although each branch does not contain all of these services. The service delivery model ensures equitable access to public library services across the City and a rational approach to resource allocation. The first tier consists of 79 neighbourhood branch libraries. The second tier consists of 17 district branch libraries. The third tier consists of two research and reference libraries. The fourth tier encompasses the non-branch services such as bookmobile, home library service, literacy and technology-based services.

While all branches do not all match the criteria established for the appropriate tier, the model provides a framework for assessing branches and services provided and for future planning. This model was approved in 1998 and subsequently validated in a review undertaken for the Board in 1999.

Library Materials Budget

A formula for allocating the library materials budget was approved by the Board in April 1998. The formula was designed to reduce the disparity in per capita expenditure for library collections across the City and shift funding to communities in which per capita funding had been below the average.

City-Wide Services

Staff reviews of the following city-wide services were undertaken: bookmobile service; home library service including home delivery for shut-ins, institutional service, talking book service, deposit collection service; adult literacy services. The reviews and recommendations were approved by the Board and implemented.

Also included in this category are the electronic services of the Library. Following on the introduction of the single automated library information system in 1999, many services were harmonized and access was extended to 24/7 insofar as possible. The number of public computer workstations offering Internet access was greatly expanded. A standard group of research data bases was made available and the website and Virtual Reference Library were developed.

Service Policies

Various service policies were developed to harmonize practice in the following areas: patron registration, loan periods for library materials, overdue fines and fees; rules of conduct, exclusion reinstatement and appeals, emergency closing, Internet use, room booking and fee structures. These policies have all been approved by the Board and implemented.

Branch Planning Study

In 1999, in response to a specific request from the City of Toronto's Budget Committee, a branch planning study was undertaken. The study looked at branches across the City in relation to location, distance, population, facility, cost and performance as part of an overall framework to address service harmonization. With an extensive branch network and an aging facilities infrastructure, Toronto Public Library faces challenges in maintaining a vibrant library system that is well positioned to provide the combination of new and traditional services expected by citizens. The study indicated that the Toronto Public Library provides more branches in relation to its population than any other major North American library system. Conversely, the collection size and hours of service offered at branches are lower than the average for comparable Canadian libraries. Amalgamation presented an opportunity to look at the branch system in its entirety and identify how branches can build and contribute to an effective and efficient library network. To support this, the study identified opportunities for branch rationalization as well as the investment required to provide effective service delivery into the future. The plan called for an overall ten percent reduction in the number of branches. It was argued that this would address significantly undersized neighbourhood and district branches, build or expand branches in high needs and/or growth areas, improve collections and hours of service at remaining branches and manage growth cost effectively.

In the ensuing public consultation process, the idea of closing any branch, no matter how small, was resoundingly rejected, with the exception of the Trinity/Niagara "mini-branch" which did not re-open in the renovated community centre. Other North American cities trying to close or consolidate branches have had similar experiences. At its October 29, 2001 meeting, the Board passed motion 01-171 confirming its commitment to the existing branch infrastructure and rejecting the idea of branch closures for future budget reductions. In addition, in 2001, the Board and Council approved capital funds for another new neighbourhood branch in partnership with Parks and Recreation, in the St. James Town community.

Branch Open Hours

Coming into amalgamation, branch open hours varied across the City. The following chart highlights some of the differences:

Open Hours Comparison of Predecessor Boards (1997)

Predecessor Board	Population	Total Hours of Opening per year	Hours of opening per 1,000 population
North York	589,653	47,988	81
York	146,534	13,290	91
Toronto	653,734	87,750	134
East York	107,822	12,043	112
Scarborough	558,960	46,332	83
Etobicoke	328,718	30,598	93

The Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library was considered separately since it provided an upper tier service to the entire population.

An analysis of the existing branch open hours indicated the following areas for review: number of hours, Sunday hours, schedule of hours and enhancements.

The first aspect of branch service hours to be addressed was Sunday service. At the time of amalgamation, five of the seven predecessor Boards offered Sunday service hours for differing periods during the year and for three-and-a-half to four hours per Sunday open. The former Scarborough and York did not offer Sunday service. Customer demand for Sunday service was high and consistently, it was the most asked for enhancement to library service hours. To address this inequity, in 1999, the existing budget for Sunday service was redistributed across the City so that the two research and reference and the 17 district branches all offered Sunday service for 28 Sundays per year for three-and-a-half hours per Sunday. The plan provided a geographical distribution of service at the largest and busiest locations. To do this, Sunday service was withdrawn at six locations and added at six other locations. As a preliminary step, the introduction of Sunday service in York and Scarborough was advanced to two of the Scarborough district libraries and one in York, effective March 21 to May 9, 1999. The new schedule was fully implemented on October 17, 1999 and ran for 28 Sundays until May 14, 2000.

The next expansion of Sunday service occurred in 2000. The Sunday service schedule was expanded from 28 to 37 Sundays running from September to June. In addition, Sunday service was extended to eight neighbourhood libraries. The neighbourhood branches were selected based on principles of geographic equity, service effectiveness as

determined by facility, location and usage criteria and proximity (within 1.6 km) to top quartile children's priority areas identified by the City of Toronto.

While the long-term objective is to extend Sunday service throughout the remainder of the year, no further changes have been made since 2000. Budget challenges have been such that it has not been possible to consider further enhancements to Sunday service. The first phase of Sunday service harmonization in 1999 was accomplished within the existing budget for Sunday service. The second phase in 2000 required an additional \$368,700 which was approved as part of the 2000 operating budget.

While a significant step towards service harmonization was achieved through the extension of Sunday service hours across the City, there has been little change in the schedule of service hours during the week.

In 2003, Friday evening service during July and August was eliminated due to budget reductions.

In 2004, as a result of budget reductions, the late close time will be standardized to 8:30 p.m. with a reduction of two hours per week at four branches in the West Region.