

Youth Participation in Library Board Decision Making

Date:	September 23, 2013
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

This report responds to the Toronto Public Library (TPL) Board's request for staff to report on the feasibility of incorporating youth membership (ages 15 - 17) on the Board. In response to the Board motion, the report recommends a pilot project to appoint two Youth Advisors to work with a designated Board member liaison to provide feedback from youth through this mechanism to the Board. The pilot will be implemented in 2014 and reviewed after June 2015.

To address the Board motion, requirements for Board membership in the *Public Libraries Act* and the City Appointments Policy were reviewed. Both the *Public Libraries Act* and the City's Public Appointments Policy require that all Board members be voting members and be at least 18 years old; a requirement that is reflected in the Board's Procedural By-law. This age requirement prevents youth ages 15 - 17 from formally participating, even as non-voting members, on the Toronto Public Library Board.

To address the spirit and intent of the Board motion, it is recommended that two Youth Advisors be appointed to work with a Board member appointed as a liaison. Youth Advisors would provide input, with a focus on input from teenagers, into policies and services at the Board level, a direction which aligns with and supports the Library's values of equity, inclusion and service orientation. The Advisors would consult with Toronto's diverse youth, including the 1,600 members of the Library Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) and informally advise and provide a youth perspective on strategic directions, policies, services and issues. This recommendation was developed after reviewing practices across the City, including the structure of the Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) and consulting with members of the Library Youth Advisory Groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. approves a pilot project to appoint two Youth Advisors, with a review after the completion of the pilot in June 2015;
2. appoints a Board Liaison at the September 2013 meeting; and
3. directs staff to work with the appointed Board Liaison to establish the position of Youth Advisors, including the development of the application and appointment process and consultation strategies.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

An annual budget of \$1,000 will be allocated to support the initiative.

The Director Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

DECISION HISTORY

At its March 27, 2013 meeting, the Toronto Public Library Board requested that staff report back in *September 2013 on the feasibility of appointing two youth Board members to the TPL Board to attend and participate in Board meetings as non-voting members*. Also noted in the minutes is that the recommended age for youth participation is between 15 - 17 years old.

BACKGROUND

Requirements for Board Membership

Library Board members are appointed by Toronto City Council,¹ which requires all members to meet the qualifications outlined in the *Public Libraries Act*, including that all Board members must be at least 18 years old, as they must be able to act in a fiduciary capacity on behalf of the Library. The *Public Libraries Act* does not allow for non-voting members. The City's Public Appointments Policy's Board-Specific Processes and Requirements seek to address the importance of a youth perspective on the Library Board by highlighting that "a youthful perspective (age 18 to 30) is a desired qualification for at least one member of the Board."²

Toronto Youth Cabinet

The Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) is a youth advocacy organization whose focus is to develop the City's youth agenda in Toronto, and to address issues affecting youth. The TYC engages with City divisions and City Councillors through Social Development, Finance and

¹ Toronto Municipal Code (2003). Chapter 137- Library Board.

² City of Toronto. "Board-specific processes and requirements – Toronto Public Library Board" Accessed August 8, 2013 <http://www.toronto.ca/public-appointments/requirements-library.htm>

Administration (SDFA), Youth Development Unit, which acts as a trustee for the TYC. TYC also partners with community and youth groups throughout the City, such as ArtReach, the Gay Youth Corner, and South Etobicoke Youth Assembly to foster broad community engagement.

TYC Membership is open to all youth between the ages of (13 - 24). Young people can become a member of a working group or membership at large by attending at least three general meetings. The training offered to TYC members, including an orientation session and an anti-oppression session may serve as a useful model for the orientation and training of proposed Youth Advisors.

Library Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs)

Youth Advisory Groups are branch-based volunteer groups open to youth ages 13 - 19 that help TPL be more responsive to the needs of Toronto's diverse youth by providing an opportunity to influence youth services. YAGs engage youth in local branch activities and give youth opportunities to provide feedback on service planning and Library outreach initiatives. Participation supports youth in building teamwork, leadership and civic engagement skills, and their time volunteering as a member of a YAG can be counted towards their required high school community service hours.

YAGs are active in approximately 50 branches, with over 1600 members.³ In addition to providing direct feedback to staff on local branch services, YAG members are also consulted on initiatives such as capital projects and on major initiatives such as the strategic plan. Currently YAGs are not structured to coordinate, collaborate and speak with a collective voice, on issues at the Board level.

To develop a recommendation regarding youth participation on the Board, YAGs were consulted. Those consulted indicated that they were interested in providing input into Board decisions, and areas of interest include gaining experience in governance and Board processes as well as providing input into specific services and programs. Challenges to participation identified by youth included the time commitment and lack of familiarity with Board structure, role and decision-making processes.

COMMENTS

To address the Board motion, staff consulted with the City Manager's Office (Public Appointments; Strategic & Corporate Policy), reviewed the structure of the Toronto Youth Cabinet and consulted directly with YAGs about the role of youth in decision-making at the Board level.

The proposed option will provide the Board with additional information regarding youth preferences for Library services and on matters of interest to youth.

³There were a total of 1,639 YAG members in 2012

A youth perspective at the Board level provides an additional opportunity for youth to influence the strategic directions and policies of the Library by creating a more direct relationship between TPL Board and Toronto's youth population.

Proposed Youth Advisors

Role, Responsibilities, and Relationship with the Board

The two Youth Advisors would interact with the Library Board primarily through a Board liaison with the support of a designated Library staff member. Topics of interest and importance to youth would be referred to the Advisors by the Library Board, the Board liaison or staff or be suggested by YAGs or the Youth Advisor themselves. Orientation and training would be provided to the Youth Advisors to support understanding of Board governance, service planning, consultation processes and awareness of diversity and accessibility issues. Travel expenses to attend meetings and recognition of volunteer hours would support participation.

The Youth Advisors will:

- attend Library Board meetings as needed;
- provide Toronto's youth with additional opportunities to be consulted on areas of interest and importance to them, including the Library's strategic directions, policy and budget;
- inform and influence Board decisions to support services that are more responsive to the needs of youth and address barriers to participation;
- provide input on outreach and marketing strategies, including online and social media channels; and
- champion and support specific policy and program initiatives at the Board level as appropriate.

The Board Liaison will:

- represent the Youth Advisors on the Library Board and be the primary point of contact and communication with the Board;
- support the Youth Advisors and act as their mentor;
- identify items to be reviewed by the Board where a youth perspective would be of interest and refer these items to the Youth Advisors for consultation and input;
- support the Advisors in developing consultation strategies;
- work with designated Library staff to appoint Youth Advisors;
- provide updates to the Board on the Advisors' activities and project as required.

A TPL staff member will support activities of Youth Advisors and the Board Liaison.

Appointment Process

An open call for applications will be made available on the Toronto Public Library website, and the City of Toronto Public Consultation website and through the Library's Youth

Advisory Groups. Applicants will complete a short application identifying their interest and qualifications for the position, and the appointment process may include an interview. Appointments will be made by the Board Liaison in consultation with the designated staff.

Criteria for appointment will include:

- demonstrated interest in Library services and the needs of Toronto's diverse youth;
- ability to consult with youth using a variety of channels; and
- strong listening and communication skills.

Consultation

It is recommended that Youth Advisors consult with youth on matters that are referred to them by the Board or Library staff or on topics that they identify as being of interest. The YAG structure would be utilized as the primary consultation body with additional strategies to engage youth across the City, including the use of social media channels, online polls, web chats and discussion groups.

After consultation with Toronto's youth communities, the Youth Advisors will:

- communicate the results of the consultation to the Board liaison for the information of the Board; and
- make periodic presentations to the Board on areas of interest to youth.

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SIGNATURE

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