



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

16.

Open Data Policy

Date:	February 22, 2016
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

In 2014, the Toronto Public Library Board approved the addition of an Open Data Policy to the Library's Work Plan. On the weekend of November 14-15, 2015, the Library held a successful Hackathon at the Toronto Reference Library in partnership with Open Data Toronto, Open Data Institute of Toronto and Wellbeing Toronto. In keeping with the direction of the Board, staff are proposing to formalize the release of datasets as part of an Open Data Policy.

The proposed Library policy is an adaptation of the City's policy. The key policy principles are that data is made available 1) license free and 2) free of charge. The Library will determine datasets for release based on the time and resources required to release the data and the usefulness of datasets for library customers and the broader public. The public may request the release of additional data sets; staff will assess these proposals based on the criteria in the policy of a) public demand, b) value to the library sector, including academia and c) resources required to extract and format data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. approves the Open Data Policy in Attachment 1.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its March 24, 2014 meeting, the Toronto Public Library Board approved the addition of an Open Data Policy to the Library's Work Plan.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The concept of Open Data is part of a growing global movement to make public information more accessible. Providing information to the public through Open Data programs are intended to lead to more accessible, accountable and transparent government.

Open Data has been defined by the Government of Canada as “data that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed by anyone - subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and sharealike.” The key features of Open Data are as follows:

1. Availability and Access: the data must be available as a whole and at no more than a reasonable reproduction cost, preferably by downloading over the Internet. The data must also be available in a convenient and modifiable form.
2. Re-use and Redistribution: the data must be provided under terms that permit re-use and redistribution, including the intermixing with other datasets.
3. Universal Participation: everyone must be able to use, re-use and redistribute – there should be no discrimination against fields of endeavour or against persons or groups. For example, ‘non-commercial’ restrictions that would prevent ‘commercial’ use, or restrictions of use for certain purposes (e.g. only in education), are not allowed.

(Source: <http://data.gc.ca/eng/open-data-101#toc3>.)

In 2011, the City of Toronto released its Open Data Policy and has made data available at its website at www.toronto.ca/open. The site includes a link to one data set from the Library on Library locations.

Governments across Canada and around the world have developed open data initiatives. The City of Toronto is part of a group, along with municipalities of Vancouver, Edmonton and Ottawa, known as the G4, who collaborate on developing on common terms, principles and licensing agreements. Both the federal and provincial governments have open data sites. Major library systems, including the Vancouver and New York public libraries make data available to the public.

City of Toronto Policy

The City's policy is straightforward in terms of the content that will be provided to the public. Essentially, all data that is available can be made public with exceptions only being made for personal health information and information from in-camera meeting sessions and data that cannot be released under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

For the most part, the policy envisions City staff being responsible for identifying, producing, vetting and approving datasets. There is no direct role for the public. However, in practice, public requests help determine which datasets are considered for release.

Accompanying the policy is an Open Government License used by the provincial and federal government (Schedule 1 in Attachment 1). Under this license anyone may “copy, modify, publish, translate, adapt, distribute or otherwise use the Information in any medium, mode or format for any lawful purpose.” However, users must acknowledge the source of the data and no guarantees or warranty is made related to the data. The licence does not allow users to infringe on intellectual property rights (e.g. logos or trademarks), and use of the data should not be considered an endorsement.

COMMENTS

As mentioned in the Chair’s report of December 14, 2015, on the weekend of November 14-15, 2015, the Library held a successful Hackathon at Toronto Reference Library in partnership with Open Data Toronto, Open Data Institute of Toronto and Wellbeing Toronto. Over 50 participants and mentors worked together in teams to create concepts to improve library service. As part of the Hackathon, a series of data sets were provided by the Library and through the City of Toronto Open Data Catalogue. Following the success of the Hackathon, and in keeping with the direction of the Board, staff are proposing to formalize the release of datasets as part of an Open Data Policy.

The proposed Library policy is an adaptation of the City’s policy. As with the City’s policy, the Library’s policy includes the Sunlight Foundation’s principles. The Foundation is an American non-profit organization that advocates for open government. Their open data principles have been adopted internationally. The key aspects of these principles are that data is made available 1) license free and 2) free of charge. As well, the policy includes the same license that is used by the City that was developed by members of the G4, the provincial governments of Alberta and Ontario and the federal Treasury Board.

The Library’s policy differs from the City’s in one key way. A pivotal aspect of the City’s policy is the creation of a multi-layered structure, including committees and an Open Data Team, in order to implement the policy. This structure creates support and accountability for the City’s 44 divisions to release open data. As an organization, the Library is significantly smaller and simpler, but TPL emulated the City’s accountability for implementation through an approval process by the Director responsible for policy, in consultation with a cross-divisional team responsible for data governance. Though ideally, the Library would release all the non-confidential data it holds, staff must weigh the time and resources required to extract and format data versus the utility the data might have for library customers and Toronto residents. This will allow the Library to gauge the popularity of its data sets and anticipate what other sets the public will find useful or interesting. Members of the public may request the release of additional data sets. Staff will assess proposals based on the criteria in the policy of a) public demand, b) value to the library sector, including academia and c) resources required to extract and format data.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Open Data Policy