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To: Toronto Public Library Board – June 19, 2006  
From: City Librarian  
Subject: **Ontario Ministry of Culture's Public Library Sector Review – Toronto Public Library's Response**

Purpose:

To provide Toronto Public Library's input into the Ontario Ministry of Culture's review of the Province's public library sector support.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

None.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board approve the submission of the Toronto Public Library's response to the Ontario Ministry of Culture's public library sector review.

Background:

In the Fall of 2005 the Ontario Minister of Culture invited library leaders to participate in a roundtable dialogue where an initial discussion took place on a vision for Ontario's libraries, and the role of the Province in supporting libraries. The Toronto Public Library Board was represented by the then Vice Chair of the Library Board, Bill Booth, and the Director of Research and Reference, Linda Mackenzie.

A follow-up meeting was held on April 24, 2006 to expand on the earlier discussions. This meeting was attended by the City Librarian. This meeting focused on the Province's current role and support programs, the terms of reference for the Ministry's planned comprehensive analysis, articulating a vision for Ontario's public libraries, and the roles and responsibilities in a changing library sector.

The process for the public sector review was outlined by the Ministry and provides for:

- an Inter-ministerial Working Group to provide input for the process and to review the consultant's work;

- an external Advisory Panel established by the Ministry of Culture to provide high level perspectives from the library profession, academics, publishers, authors and community leaders;
- the Advisory Panel will lead a think tank to be a one-time forum that will involve an exchange among experts in broad community and public policy issues. It is hoped that this will result in visionary input on the future library and future strategic public sector support;
- consultation with Ontario's public library sector to provide sectoral and professional input, including impacts on library operations;
- other online and write-in opportunities.

This report represents a formal submission to the Ontario Ministry of Culture in response to these discussions.

Comments:

The *Ontario Ministry of Culture's Public Library Sector Review - Toronto Public Library's Response* (Attachment 1) begins with a stronger role for the Ministry of Culture in advocating for public libraries both within the provincial government and at the Federal level.

An overview of how the Toronto Public Library supports the Provincial government's priority areas (Success for Students, Better Health, Strong People, Strong Economy, Stronger Democracy, and Stronger Safer Communities) is detailed in Attachment 1 with concrete examples of Library services and programs that do this.

The current level of financial support from the province to the Toronto Public Library which takes the form of both a base household grant and a conditional grant for the Virtual Reference Library is outlined in Attachment 1. It is noted that the funding received from the province has been flat-lined since 1999 despite the dramatic changes in the operating environment including the phenomenal growth in service provision.

Following in Attachment 1 is an outline of Toronto Public Library's provincial role which includes its function as a Special Service Library Board (with responsibility for the Virtual Reference Library), the interlibrary loan system, TPL's unique collections and TPL's support for other provincial libraries and initiatives.

The report (Attachment 1) includes five recommendations:

- the provincial government takes a stronger role in advocating for the public library sector so that it can have a greater impact in policy and formulation and addressing government priorities;
- the current provincial household grant should be increased in order to more accurately reflect the reality of Ontario's largest public library operating in a very diverse environment;

- TPL views the recent establishment of Knowledge Ontario as an opportunity for the current conditional provincial VRL grant to be reviewed. The Library believes that its major strength lies in its ability to provide content for the province. TPL has the richest collection in the province and is committed to using it to developing valuable digital content. However, it would still require funding to provide this service. It is proposed that the provincial VRL funding be deconditionalised to allow TPL to apply those resources to providing digital content;
- TPL is also open to the idea of one library card for the province with appropriate provincial funding support. It is recognized that this would further extend access to the valuable provincial network of resources for all Ontarians;
- As the largest public library in Ontario, TPL has an important provincial role in providing leadership and expertise to many of the smaller public library systems. TPL reaffirms this provincial role and would be pleased to explore additional opportunities to share this expertise including the establishment of an internship program with appropriate funding.

Conclusion:

Toronto Public Library welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Public Library Sector review by the Ontario Ministry of Culture. Implementing the recommendations proposed by Toronto Public Library would result in increased recognition and support for the role of public libraries in Ontario and an enhanced capacity for Toronto Public Library to deliver library services to citizens of Toronto.

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Josephine Bryant  
City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Ontario Ministry of Culture's Public Library Sector Review – Toronto Public Library's Response