



ONTARIO MINISTRY OF CULTURE'S PUBLIC LIBRARY SECTOR REVIEW – TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY'S RESPONSE

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the largest public library in Ontario, and the only public library in Ontario with a mandated provincial role, Toronto Public Library (TPL) is pleased to contribute to the Ministry of Culture's comprehensive review of provincial support for public libraries.

TPL shares with the Ministry of Culture the need for articulating a vision for library services in the province and ensuring that effective program delivery mechanisms are in place that will benefit all inhabitants of the province. TPL also identifies with the review objective of ensuring that existing resources are effectively focused and that the vision for library services in the province is supported by the application of the resources. TPL has many partnerships with a range of provincial ministries and agencies and welcomes the opportunity for further collaboration as well as identifying duplication, gaps and opportunities.

TPL recognizes the vital contribution that all public libraries make to communities across Ontario. In its vision, the Library clearly has identified this central role:

“TPL inspires the spirit of exploration, the joy of reading and the pursuit of knowledge for people of all ages and backgrounds, beginning with the very young. As cornerstones of our neighbourhoods, our libraries connect people to each other, to their community and to their hopes and dreams... The Library promotes and enriches the democratic, cultural, educational and economic life of our diverse and evolving city.”

To achieve our vision, TPL has developed many effective partnerships with different levels of government and community agencies. Two specific examples include TPL's partnerships with the City of Toronto to address the needs of at risk neighbourhoods and with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to address issues of newcomer integration in Toronto. These initiatives reflect a multi sector approach to problem solving resulting in the parties working successfully together to achieve collaborative outcomes.

TPL believes that the timing is right for the current review of provincial support for public libraries in the province. With the recent establishment of the Federation of Public Libraries and the announcements regarding Knowledge Ontario it is an opportune time to strengthen existing partnerships and explore new ones to ensure that public libraries continue to deliver services and programs that have a positive impact on the lives of Ontarians.

As partners in delivering public library service, it is important for successful outcomes that there be shared clarity of the issues being addressed, recognition and respect for the roles and authorities of the parties, and enabling structures to facilitate collaborative solutions. It is essential that the province recognize the primary role municipalities have in delivering public library services that are relevant and responsive to their respective communities.

2. A STRONGER ADVOCACY ROLE FOR THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE

Public libraries have an important role to play in furthering the provincial government's agenda as well as the local public library mandate. In turn, the provincial government could work with the public library sector to identify areas where public libraries contribute to the provincial agenda. The Ministry could communicate this contribution to its provincial colleagues. The Ministry could assist the public library sector in gaining a voice in policy formulation, in developing outcomes and in establishing structures which support the role of public libraries. If the public library sector was involved with other ministries and agencies at an early stage of policy formulation greater results could be achieved. Public libraries could have a role in achieving provincial priorities while recognizing the mandate, autonomy and role of public libraries as outlined in the Public Libraries Act.

There are national issues which have an impact on public libraries services, for example, copyright. The Ministry could increase its advocacy for public libraries at the federal level. The ongoing discussion of copyright and privacy issues are two examples.

Public libraries as cornerstones of their communities are recognized as important public space. To maintain this presence in communities infrastructure funding is required. The ministry could support the public library sector in Ontario by identifying potential sources of funding and supporting libraries in gaining access to these funds. Specific examples include Trillium and infrastructure programs like Superbuild.

The creation of an enabling structure for public libraries and the provincial government to achieve a shared objective should be given serious consideration.

3. TPL'S CONTRIBUTION TO MEETING GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The Government of Ontario has identified five priority areas: Success for Students; Better Health; Strong People, Strong Economy; Stronger Democracy; and Stronger, Safer Communities. TPL is producing demonstrable results in all of these areas and beyond. The Library believes that it is an important partner to the Provincial Government and can help the government achieve results in its priority areas.

Success for Students

Public libraries have a proud history of providing reading and literacy support to the public. Libraries have become known as trusted sources of information and provide extensive collections, both in breadth of coverage and in depth. Libraries encourage reading and support literacy in people of all ages, from the very young to seniors. Increasingly, public libraries have moved towards the provision of digital information, and libraries have enabled people to acquire information and digital skills, as well as to provide free computer access.

TPL has played an increasing role in supporting schools and promoting literacy. TPL has been active in providing this information and reading support for students in the City of Toronto. It has done so in the following ways:

Promotion of Reading: Preschool Age

Public libraries are the major public institution in Canada that address the learning needs of the preschool child. Libraries' role in ensuring the reading readiness of the preschool child has long been established. Public libraries are also well positioned to partner with other organizations such as nursery schools, day care centres, public health departments etc in order to promote reading readiness. With appropriate funding these programs could be extended ultimately ensuring that a new generation of readers is created.

TPL has developed innovative pre-school programming for all children and support in an effort to boost Early Development Instrument scores for children who are newcomers or who live in at-risk communities, e.g. the Every Child Ready to Read program. The Library also has extensive outreach initiatives within the city to young parents.

Promotion of Reading: School Age

TPL supports students through the promotion of literacy, content support for curriculum and school based projects and by supporting students in achieving their volunteer requirements.

Promoting Literacy

- TPL is a founding library of the national TD Summer Reading Club, a successful multi-sector initiative partnership involving business, library community and National Library of Canada (NLC).
- The Library delivers high quality program reading support programs in many branches. TPL's expertise is shared across the province and its approach is followed in many libraries.
- The English Can Be Fun program helps to prepare Newcomer children for success in school. This program is conducted in the summer months and in some locations is offered on a year-round basis.

Content Support

- The Virtual Reference Library is a major source of Canadian content for homework support. In addition, TPL's two gateways, RAMP (for Youth) and KidsSpace (for children) provide invaluable support and resources for young people in their quest for knowledge and information.
- Homework Clubs for Youth in certain at-risk neighbourhoods provide both space and tutors for young people who need a safe and quiet environment and homework help to get through the demands of a challenging school curriculum.
- Other TPL gateways support the school curriculum, e.g. Ontario History Quest a popular source of information on Ontario's history. In addition, TPL has a wide range of electronic data bases which are increasingly popular among students as they are provided free of charge, are available 24/7, and are a reliable source of information.

Volunteer Requirements

- Youth Advisory Groups (YAGS) have been established in many library branches. These groups provide advice to library staff in the development of services and programs for teens. The YAGS also support completion of volunteer hours, a requirement for high school graduation. TPL's expertise has been shared across the province. Other volunteer opportunities are available in library programs.

Better Health

Through its general collections and its electronic data bases, TPL is well placed to be a source of information for the public on a variety of health related subjects. In addition, its specialized services such as the Consumer Health Information Service (CHIS) focus on prevention and aid the public in making informed health care choices.

Strong People, Strong Economy

Public libraries have vast resources to equip individuals and communities to contribute to the development of a strong economy. By providing people with

information, libraries act as engines of growth and development that has a pervasive and stimulating effect on all aspects of society.

Newcomer Integration

Toronto is the first home for many newcomers who eventually settle across the province. Half of Torontonians were born abroad and 8 in 10 new immigrants have neither English nor French as their mother tongue. TPL assists newcomers through settlement support, in language acquisition, and in their search for employment and accreditation. The Library also assists newcomers in maintaining links with their countries of origin.

Settlement Support

- TPL has provided leadership in extending the program of offering settlement services in public libraries. TPL provides a provincial library representative on the provincial steering committee
- Through this initiative TPL partnered in a video promoting the public library to newcomers which is used by settlement workers across the province

Language Acquisition

- TPL has partnered with the Boards of Education and CIC to provide language classes for Newcomers
- The Library also has extensive collections of advanced English Language Learning (ELL) materials in a variety of formats.

Accreditation and Employment Search Support

- In partnership with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, TPL has expanded collections related to accreditation and employment support in a variety of formats.
- In recognition of the important role public libraries play in assisting newcomers in finding employment Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided TPL with funding to expand collections

Cultural Connection

- Given the enormous diversity reflected in the city of Toronto and the need to meet the needs of all the residents of the City, TPL has collections in over 40 languages, as well as extensive online resources which help Newcomers stay in touch with their culture and language of origin.

Economic Growth

- Public Libraries provide extensive support to small business. Access to up-to-date information is essential for a business to remain profitable. Information is essential for the decision-making process in any business. Few businesses can afford to acquire and maintain their own library (especially small businesses) and therefore rely heavily on public libraries for this service. TPL provides extensive and specialized business collections at the two Research and Reference libraries and comprehensive business collections at its 17 District libraries. TPL

developed SmallbizXpress, an online gateway to sources of information for entrepreneurs.

- Public libraries house a wealth of information and resources that can contribute to the lifelong learning process. Libraries play an active role in supporting the formal education process and in supporting more informal, independent learning. Public libraries are well suited to this role as they are generally accessible to a large population, and are known to be a supportive environment where people feel free to ask questions and learn. The library's collection is a gold mine for the adult learner looking for self-improvement or self-directed learning. Libraries, through partnerships and co-operation ensure that value added in the lifelong learning process is greater than the sum of the individual institutional contributors. TPL provides a good example of this in their Library **Le@rning** Centres, which are computer classrooms built with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Industry Canada's Urban CAP program. Hands on classroom sessions introduce citizens to the Internet and the wide range of electronic information available through the TPL website.
- Literacy continues to be a fundamental skill for economic and social development of Canada. TPL has an adult literacy program that offers free, one-on-one tutoring in basic reading, writing and math for English-speaking adults 16 years or older. Volunteer tutors work with learners to help them reach their literacy goals.
- Job Seeking and Retraining: By providing business and company directories, resources dealing with resume writing and interviewing techniques, libraries provide unemployed persons with important tools in the job search process. The availability of Internet facilities and a wide range of newspapers are also important tools for the employment search. Public libraries also link newcomers with information about attaining accreditation or upgrading to participate in the Canadian job market.

Stronger Democracy

Free universal access to information is the cornerstone of a democratic society. Universal access to information is a strong equalizing force, it fosters participation and inclusiveness and provides opportunities for individuals and communities to engage and participate in their city and their neighbourhoods.

- Public Libraries often distribute and provide access to community information. TPL provides an online Community Information database available both in library branches and remotely. Library staff provides skilled help in accessing this community information.
- Public Libraries promote participation in a democratic society. By providing access and assistance in using a wide range of government information at the municipal, provincial and federal level, public libraries support citizens being informed and active participants in government

decision-making. TPL's Urban Affairs Library is a specialized depository of municipal government information and related issues. Key municipal documents are made available in TPL branches to facilitate public consultation. TPL also has depository status for federal and provincial government information. Libraries support for the democratic process and the free flow of information is fundamental to the value that they add to society.

- Public Libraries are community gathering places. They act as community cornerstones, focal points and gathering places. Public libraries have the broadest possible public mandate and are one of the few institutions that are open and accessible to every single person in a community at no cost. Public Libraries offer access to public space where community groups can meet and individuals can study, read or access the Internet. TPL offers community theatres, auditoriums and meeting rooms across the City and free public access to the Internet and word processing facilities at 99 branches

Stronger, Safer Communities

Libraries are places for all, regardless of social, economic, religious, political or ethnic status. Libraries are apolitical and supporters of intellectual freedom and the individuals right to know about and be part of a community, thereby promoting social cohesion and strong communities. In this regard TPL has been actively involved in building strong communities.

- TPL has developed expertise in reaching at-risk communities. It has worked as an integral partner with the City of Toronto in identifying and addressing at-risk communities. The Library has developed a strategy for implementing programs and services in response to the needs and priorities of the identified at-risk communities.
- TPL has also been a partner in a Human Resources Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) project which is a national pilot project to promote community development and provide support in the search for employment in at-risk communities. The Library has demonstrated that it has important resources to share in the development of human resources and skills development.

4. PROVINCIAL FUNDING FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The National Context

Other large Canadian urban centres dealing with population and income diversity have higher per capita provincial funding than that received by the TPL from the Ontario Government.

The Canadian Urban Libraries Council conducts a survey of the level of provincial funding for urban libraries. In a comparison of a three other large urban libraries (Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver), TPL, receives the lowest level of provincial funding which is consistent for other Ontario communities.

PER CAPITA PROVINCIAL FUNDING				
	Toronto*	Montreal	Calgary	Vancouver
2001	1.66	3.26	3.96	2.18
2002	1.66	NA	3.90	2.06
2003	1.66	NA	4.21	2.38
2004	1.66	2.65	4.16	2.01

*Toronto total grant figure excludes the conditional grant for the VRL.

Ontario Provincial Funding

Over the years public libraries have received grants from the Government of Ontario to help deliver services to people in their communities. The level of funding has been on the decline. Early in their mandate, the Conservative Government reduced provincial operating grants to public libraries by 40% and eliminated several grant programs.

In 1998, the ministry responsible for operating grants for public libraries re-examined how the province's public library funding was allocated and argued for allocating grants in a way that recognized population growth while maintaining library funding in smaller communities. Libraries in Ontario were assured that their operating grants would not go below the level of the previous year to maintain their service to the public. Funding rates were established, as follows: rural rate of \$4.80 per household, urban rate of \$4.08 per household, and First Nations rate of \$1.50 per capita.

In June 2005, the Liberal Ontario government announced further cuts, a total of \$1.2 million to grant funding of provincial services. Of that, the Southern Ontario Library Service and the Ontario Library Service North agencies were reduced by \$700,000.

Provincial grants to TPL made up 3.97% of the Library's operating budget in 2005, with the City of Toronto providing approximately 90% and the balance coming from fees, fines, charges and other sources.

The Provincial grants allocation to TPL has remained flat lined for a number of years. However, the value of the grant has been eroded by inflation. Base grant allocations to libraries are based on the number of households in the area of jurisdiction of the particular library. TPL has experienced pressures related to population growth, changes in the household structure (e.g. the increase in the number of single parent households), increasing diversity and the fact that Toronto remains the destination of choice for newcomers to Canada. The base

grant to TPL has not increased since 1999 and has in fact declined in constant dollars. In addition, the number of households in Toronto has increased since 1996 census which is used in the formula. Statistics Canada advises that the number of households in Toronto is underreported by at least 250,000.

Toronto Public Library: Provincial Grants Received					
	VRL \$*	Estimated Number of Households**	Household \$	Total \$	Total Adjusted for inflation
1995	NA	922,500	NA	8,711,539	8,711,539
1996	NA	930,900	NA	7,233,374	7,130,627
1997	NA	939,300	NA	5,582,055	5,410,539
1998	1,522,700	947,700	4,059,355	5,582,055	5,365,576
1999	1,522,700	956,100	4,127,362	5,650,062	5,342,156
2000	1,446,565	964,500	4,127,362	5,573,927	5,162,329
2001	1,446,565	972,900	4,127,362	5,573,927	4,984,929
2002	1,446,565	986,300	4,127,362	5,573,927	4,900,724
2003	1,446,565	999,600	4,127,362	5,573,927	4,760,014
2004	1,446,565	1,013,000	4,127,380	5,573,945	4,683,178
2005	1,446,565	1,026,400	4,127,362	5,573,927	4,572,464

*The VRL funding represents designated funding for the development of the Provincial Virtual Reference Library.

** Estimates provided by the City of Toronto Planning Division

Taking into account inflation, by 2005, in real terms TPL received only 52% of the funding which it received in 1995.

Growth in Services

Despite this flat lining of provincial grants, TPL has experienced phenomenal increase in demand in certain areas. This is further indication of the increasingly important role that the Library plays in communities in terms of the provision of information, supporting the knowledge-based economy, as a safe public space where communities meet, and a place where community capacity building occurs.

Areas of growth are:

Areas of Growth: TPL			
Indicator	1998	2005	% Change
Virtual Visits	1,395,224*	21,260,181	1,423.8
Circulation	26,892,824	30,575,254	13.7
Holds Filled	1,596,016	4,361,952	173.3

* 1999 figure.

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.

5. TPL'S PROVINCIAL ROLE

TPL as a Special Library Service Board

TPL is a municipally authorized board providing library service to the City of Toronto as provided for in the Public Libraries Act. However, TPL is also named in Section 40 (3) of the act as a "special library service board and may provide library resources and services to the Ontario library community" which is a role unique to TPL. The Act defines in Section 40 (1) what the function of such special library boards is "to provide the resources and services that the Minister specifies and may make grants to special library service boards out of legislative appropriations for library purposes".

For over seven years, TPL has collaborated with the Ontario Government to deliver the Virtual Reference Library (VRL) to all Ontarians. The VRL provides reference and information services utilizing advanced information and telecommunications technology. It permits province-wide access to the collections and staff expertise of the TPL. In 2005, a French interface and content was added to the VRL to create the Bibliothèque de Référence Virtuelle, with the Ottawa Public Library taking the lead in this initiative.

The VRL offers four key functional areas: subject Guides, Library resources and Links (remote access to TPL resources including licensed databases), Research Guides, and Gateways (e.g. Ontario History Quest, SmallBizXpress, NewsConnect and Career Bookmarks).

TPL receives an annual conditional grant (currently \$1,466,565) from the Province that is designated for the establishment and maintenance of the VRL. Prior to 1998 this grant was directed to the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library on an unconditional basis to provide research and reference services province-wide. Both the actual and the inflation adjusted value of the grant have been reduced significantly since amalgamation. In addition, as noted, there has not been any other grant funding to undertake the other research and reference work that was previously undertaken by the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library.

The provincial VRL grant, however, does not meet the actual cost of the work that TPL puts into the Provincial VRL. The Library invests a further \$4.4 million annually in the form of staff support to the site, the development and maintenance of content for the site, the creation of new gateways, the technology itself, and the management of the software and the hardware and the province-wide communications support.

The recent announcement of the establishment of Knowledge Ontario provides a unique opportunity for TPL to establish a partnership in the provision of digital services to the Province. The deconditionalisation and growth of the VRL grant to TPL would facilitate the establishment of effective partnerships for the digital library. TPL's particular strength in this area is the provision of content which includes: internet site selection, digitization of TPL's vast collections, focusing on Canadian, Ontario and Toronto materials, use of staff expertise to write research guides and pathfinders. Specific content areas where TPL has a leading edge are: rich Canadian historical collections, science resources, health information, business and economics, news information from around the world, and employment and career resources. In addition, TPL has expertise in delivering service to Newcomers and at-risk communities, and in terms of service delivery to the public (policies and codes of conduct etc.) and this expertise can be shared. In order to make a real and meaningful impact in terms of content provision, TPL would need to be freed from its other financial responsibilities in terms of the VRL and apply its resources and strengths to content provision.

TPL could play an effective role in sharing its investment and its experience, expertise and equipment with other Ontario public libraries that wish to digitize their collections.

Interlibrary Loan System

All public libraries in Ontario participate in resource sharing. However, because of the breadth and depth of TPL's collection it is a net lender (loans more books than it borrows from other systems) of library materials to other libraries across Ontario. In 2005 TPL loaned 8,144 items and borrowed 4,339 items from other libraries.

Unique Holdings

The Toronto Reference Library is a cultural resource for both Canada and Ontario. It makes a contribution to bibliographic control for Canada and has unique holdings of materials on early Canada/Ontario. As a result it is a destination for many researchers in a variety of areas e.g. early Canadian history, genealogy, Canadian Theatre Records etc.

One Library Card for the Province

To maximize access to the Knowledge Ontario network and other unique TPL holdings, and those of other public libraries in the province, TPL supports the idea of a one library card for the province. It recognizes that this would further extend access to the valuable provincial network of resources for all Ontarians.

There are obvious cost implications for the introduction of such a card especially for those libraries who are net contributors. Should the one card for Ontario be introduced it would require funding from the provincial government. Alberta and British Columbia have successfully introduced a one card system, both with financial support from provincial government.

Support for Provincial Libraries and Initiatives

TPL is a founding member of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) and contributes resources to the initiative

TPL also participates in consortia purchasing of electronic resources through the CELPLO consortium and has contributed expertise to the process.

TPL is a major contributor to the national and provincial library community through both its membership and its enrichment of annual conferences by providing speakers.

TPL would welcome a provincially sponsored internship program where librarians from rural, First Nation or other library systems could work with TPL staff to develop expertise in areas which would be beneficial to their communities for example, at risk neighbourhoods, youth, children, digitization, and community outreach.

6. CONCLUSION

As the largest public library in Ontario, TPL has a unique provincial role. As such TPL is pleased to make an input to this important provincial initiative of reviewing provincial support public library service in Ontario.

TPL, in fulfilling its local mandate, also furthers the provincial government's priority areas. The Library has developed many services and programs that stand in direct support of these priorities.

TPL has over the years demonstrated that it has the ability to develop successful partnerships with many government ministries (both provincial and federal) and with a range of other not-for-profit organizations. TPL is committed to partnerships, not only to ensure that duplication of efforts is avoided but to ensure that the impact of the programs and services that are delivered is maximized.

If the province were to take a stronger role in advocating for public library services and assist the public library sector in participating in policy formulation in key areas the public library could make stronger impact in ensuring positive outcomes for all Ontarians.

The current provincial household grant should be reviewed 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 a provincial audience. TPL has the richest collection in the province and is committed to using it to develop 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 for the province.

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.