

## Toronto Public Library Advertising – Response to Concerns

<b>Date:</b>	March 24, 2014
<b>To:</b>	Toronto Public Library Board
<b>From:</b>	City Librarian

### SUMMARY

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The purpose of this report is to respond to the Toronto Public Library Board’s request at its November 18, 2013 meeting to address the concerns of a member of the public regarding the use of the word “free” in reference to Toronto Public Library services.

The deputant expressed his concern that the use of the term “free” in reference to library services is a misrepresentation of facts and asked that the Board no longer use this term when promoting library services.

The Library’s use of the word “free” in reference to its services is in keeping with established practice and convention within the public sector where there is no individual or direct charge to the consumer to access the service. In these cases, the use of the word “free” is not a misrepresentation of fact because the organization is not claiming that there is no cost to deliver the service; rather, it is that there is no cost to individuals to make use of the service.

### FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There is no financial impact to the 2014 operating budget resulting from this report.

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

### DECISION HISTORY

At its November 18, 2013 meeting, the Board heard a presentation from a member of the public, Anthony Nolan, regarding Toronto Public Library’s recent advertising campaign promoting e-books and e-magazines. He expressed his concern that the use of the term “free” in reference to these library services is a misrepresentation of facts and asked that the Board no longer use this term when promoting library services.

In response to a request from board member Ross Parry, the Board Chair requested that staff report at an upcoming meeting regarding these concerns about the Library's advertising campaigns.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

In October 2013, Toronto Public Library launched an advertising campaign to inform people about its selection of current and popular e-books and e-magazines available online at [torontopubliclibrary.ca/ereads](http://torontopubliclibrary.ca/ereads). During the campaign, commuters saw ads promoting the Library's e-books and e-magazines on subways, streetcars and outdoor transit shelters. The campaign was part of a long-term strategy to increase awareness of the Library's e-content.

A recent survey found that 48% of Library users and 24% of non-users were aware that the Library offers e-books for borrowing. Although awareness is low, demand is high among those who know about e-content. In 2012 alone, there was a 105% increase in e-book usage and this has grown by another 96% in 2013. In September 2013, the Library began actively promoting its e-magazine titles. Since then, borrowing rates have increased 100%.

## **COMMENTS**

When communicating about new library services (e.g. e-books and e-magazines), or communicating to residents who may not be familiar with library services in general (e.g. newcomers), the Library often highlights that these services are free. For example, when promoting library card registrations, communications materials state "If you live, work or go to school in Toronto, you can get a free library card." This clarity helps to reduce misunderstanding and confusion, provides better customer service, and ultimately increases usage of library services. This clarity is especially important in the case of library services since it is the mandate and one of the core values of the library to provide free, equitable access to service, with as few barriers to access as possible.

In the case of the Library's e-content campaign, it was important to not only communicate that the content is available for borrowing, but also to make clear that there is no additional charge for this service, as this is not widely understood by the public, especially among non-library users, who were one of the target audiences for the campaign.

Within the public sector there is an established practice and convention to label service as free where there is no individual or direct charge to the consumer to access the service, and common practice to indicate how the service is paid for with prominent placement of the logo of the sponsoring municipality or government.

Many services and programs offered by the City of Toronto are advertised as free, including:

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department's publicity poster for this year's Spring Blooms event advertises free admission. The City of Toronto logo is prominently placed directly below this statement as is the sponsoring City department's website address. Similarly, admission to the Far Enough Farm on Centre Island, High Park Zoo, and

Riverdale Farm are all advertised as free on the City's Zoo & Animal Attractions web page with the City's logo prominently placed on the page.

City of Toronto. Parks, Forestry & Recreation. Spring Blooms

[http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20of%20Toronto/Parks%20Forestry%20&%20Recreation/Home/Images/Home/spring\\_blooms\\_b.jpg](http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20of%20Toronto/Parks%20Forestry%20&%20Recreation/Home/Images/Home/spring_blooms_b.jpg)

City of Toronto. Parks, Forestry & Recreation. Zoo & Animal Attractions

<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=ac88dada600f0410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

- City's Community Environment Days website advertises that a green bin and kitchen container can be picked up for free when participating in the event. Councillors who personalize publicity for this event for their constituencies also use the free statement with the City's logo prominently placed on their poster.

City of Toronto. Community Environment Days

<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=e20d433112b02410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

Councillor Mark Grimes Post for Community Environment Day

<http://markgrimes.ca/ward-6-community-environment-day/>

Communications for provincially-funded services also use the term free:

- Toronto District School Board's brochure for Adult ESL classes advertises free classes and places this phrase prominently in the ad in a pronounced green colour. The school board's logo and website address appear directly below the phrase.

Toronto Board of Education

<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/AdultLearners/docs/ESL2013fallfinalweb.pdf>

- Ministry of Health and Long Term Care advertises its Telehealth Ontario service as a free, confidential telephone service. The web page for this service bears the trillium logo at the top of the page. Similarly, the Ministry's web information page about the flu states that it will help residents find a free flu shot clinic near them. The trillium logo is clearly evident on the page.

Ontario. Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Telehealth Ontario

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/telehealth/>

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Flu Shot

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/publichealth/flu/>

In these and other cases, there is not a misrepresentation of fact because the organization is not claiming that there is no cost to deliver the service; rather, it is that there is no cost to individuals to make use of the service.

On all communications and promotions, the Library prominently displays the Toronto Public Library logo, indicating that the services are provided by a publicly funded municipal organization. Where applicable, logos and statements about other funding sources (e.g. grants, sponsors, partner contributions) are also included. For example, in the Library's *What's On* publication, the Library recognizes all government funding sources, as well as grants, donations and sponsorships. Depending on the type of communication, its intended audience, and the communication channel being used to deliver the message, more or less detail about the funding source is possible. In the case of the Library's e-content advertising campaign, simple language with few words was most effective, as the messages were being delivered to commuters, in busy environments with a lot of other messaging surrounding them.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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City Librarian