



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Social Impact Study - Update

Date: March 24, 2025

To: Toronto Public Library Board

From: City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide the Toronto Public Library Board with an update on activities related to promoting and applying the findings of [*Enabling Torontonians to Grow and Thrive: Measuring the Social Impact of Toronto Public Library*](#) (*Social Impact Study*), a ground breaking study that provides an empirical, evidence-based measurement approach. This approach moves beyond traditional statistical reporting measures — like number of visits and uses of services — and helps us better understand the ways that Toronto Public Library (TPL) services actually impact library users.

The Library Board endorsed the findings of the study at the October 2023 Board meeting. The launch and further promotion of the study was impacted by the October 2023 cybersecurity incident. Despite these challenges, TPL was able to successfully launch the study in May 2024 at the Canadian Urban Libraries Council Annual Spring meeting in Montreal, Quebec, to an audience of Canadian public library CEOs. Following the launch, TPL senior leadership presented the findings of the study to a variety of national and international audiences. In addition, TPL created a dedicated Social Impact page on [tpl.ca](#) to provide easy access to the executive summary and full report as well as key

messages. The study's findings provided essential empirical evidence to support TPL's 2024 and 2025 budget submissions to the City of Toronto and informed the development of TPL's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan. The findings of the study provide valuable empirical evidence on the value of public libraries that is needed now more than ever. It provides supporting evidence on the impact of public dollars in library budget submissions while also proving to be a useful advocacy to protect against budget cuts.

TPL continues to promote the findings and methodology of this study on the international stage. TPL is actively sought after by other library systems, library associations, academics, journals, and magazines to discuss the study and its findings. This study has sparked a wider discussion in the library community about innovative approaches to measuring library impact.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This report has no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

The Director, Finance & CFO has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

This report advances TPL's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan priority of Social Connection, Civic Engagement and Democracy by demonstrating the vital role TPL plays in enabling Torontonians to grow and thrive, while identifying the need to continue to invest in library services at a time when social cohesion is more important than ever.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

TPL is an essential public institution that provides access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities for all. However, its true impact extends beyond books and buildings, it shapes communities, bridges inequities, and empowers individuals. TPL's Social Impact Study is critical in demonstrating how TPL contributes to the social, economic, and cultural well-being of Torontonians, particularly for historically marginalized and underrepresented populations.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on October 30, 2023, the Library Board endorsed [Measuring the Social Impact of Toronto Public Library](#), which detailed the findings of TPL's Social Impact Study and directed staff to share the report more broadly.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

TPL's measurement journey has evolved from traditional metrics, which focused on basic inputs like visits, website clicks, or program attendance, to more meaningful outcome measures that assess the true impact of library service. From anecdotal information and the stories of customers, it has previously been very clear that TPL has a significant impact, but until this study, there has not been a way to measure and quantify that impact. The study was made possible by a generous donation through the Toronto Public Library Foundation (TPL Foundation), enabling TPL to partner with innovative Danish research firm Seismonaut. The study employs a unique approach that is the first of its kind in North America to measure the value of the library and its services using their Experience Impact Compass.

The approach is based on a similar study of the Danish Library system conducted by Seismonaut in 2020, and uses a methodology called the Experience Impact Compass. This methodology builds on The Cultural Value Project, a comprehensive British research project, initiated by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The approach aims to centre individual experiences in understanding the impact of services.

This study introduces an evidence-based approach to measuring TPL's impact beyond visit counts and service usage. While customer stories have long highlighted the library's significance, this is the first effort to quantify its true impact on users' lives.

COMMENTS

Since engaging with Seismonaut in January 2023, TPL has engaged in a number of activities to promote the study and its unique methodology. The purpose of these activities was to generate discussion on innovative approaches to library impact assessment, discuss the study's findings, promote TPL as a leader in this field and foster collaborative approaches to library research. The activities

began in August 2023 and continue into the future with many activities planned throughout 2025.

In partnership with the TPL Foundation, TPL engaged an external marketing and communications firm to develop key messages and an executive summary of the report. These communications assets were used to create a landing page on both TPL's and the TPL Foundation's websites that is dedicated to the study and its findings. As well, these assets were used to promote the report to a variety of stakeholders and audiences such as City officials, library leaders, TPL Foundation donors and prospects, and the public. The executive summary language is accessible and geared towards a general audience. The findings from the study also informed the development of TPL's new 2025-2029 Strategic Plan.

Alongside the above, the TPL Foundation has been using the study and executive summary in donor meetings and at donor events to showcase TPL's leadership, to outline evidence of TPL's community impact, and to underscore the need to further accelerate the Library's impact through philanthropic support.

Conferences and Presentations

To date, senior TPL staff conducted approximately 10 presentations on the Social Impact Study to audiences ranging from internal staff, international library professionals, City staff, public library CEOs, library associations, academics, donors and researchers. Some highlights of these conferences and presentations are below:

- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), World Library and Information Congress 2023, Rotterdam, Netherlands, August 2023
- Canadian Association of Research Libraries, Canadian Library Assessment Workshop, London, Canada, October 2023
- Strategic Plan Staff Consultations (six sessions in total), February – April 2024
- Keynote presentation at the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) Annual Spring Session, Montreal, Canada, May 2024
- IV International Conference: [Re]Thinking the Library, Ovar, Portugal, September 2024

- Ontario Library Association, 2025 Annual Super Conference, Toronto, Canada, January 2025

International Publications and Interviews

In addition to conducting conference presentations, senior library staff were interviewed by a number of international library journals, magazines and blogs to discuss the findings of the Social Impact Study. The Dutch library magazine *Bibliotheekblad* interviewed TPL's Director of Policy, Planning, and Performance Management, along with lead researchers from Seismonaut, about the study. The findings were published in the magazine's January 2024 issue. The *Association des Bibliothécaires de France* library journal, *Bibliothèque(s)*, requested a written article from TPL's Director, Policy, Planning and Performance Management on the findings of the Social Impact Study. The journal article will be published in the April 2025 edition of *Bibliothèque(s)*. In addition, several Danish library blogs also featured posts about TPL's study and its connection to the original Danish research.

Planned Activities

TPL intends to continue building the momentum of the study's findings through 2025 and onwards. Interest in this new approach to library impact assessment continues to grow throughout the library community and among academics and researchers. Several Canadian library associations and systems are planning to conduct similar studies in 2025 using the same Experience Impact Compass. As an example, The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) is leading an initiative where eight or more of its member libraries will use the Experience Impact Compass to measure social impact. This will provide an opportunity for comparative analysis with other library systems across Canada.

New York Public Library's (NYPL) recent study, [Libraries & Well-Being: A Case Study from The New York Public Library](#), also identifies the vital role libraries play in supporting personal growth and well-being. TPL is collaborating with NYPL to discuss the connections between the two studies and generate discussions for further research. NYPL and TPL have prepared a joint presentation submission on social impact and well-being for the American Library Association's (ALA) 2025 Annual Conference. Plans are also underway to conduct a similar joint presentation with NYPL at the upcoming Urban Libraries Council (ULC) CEO Roundtable in June 2025.

CULC has adopted the study's methodology to produce a comparable report for eight Canadian public library systems. This report will provide additional comparative data for TPL and contribute to the expanding body of research on impact measurement. The final report is expected to be completed by late 2025.

Below are a number of planned activities throughout 2025 where TPL staff will be presenting and discussing the findings of the study:

- Urban Libraries Council (ULC) CEO Roundtable, Toronto, Canada, June 2025
- American Library Association, 2025 Annual Conference, Philadelphia, USA, June 2025 (*to be confirmed*)
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), World Library and Information Congress, Astana, Kazakhstan, August 2025
- Metropolitan Libraries Section, IFLA, Annual Conference, Toronto, Canada, October 2025

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SIGNATURE

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