



**STAFF REPORT  
ACTION REQUIRED**

**Food and Alcohol Policy**

**Date:** September 29, 2025

**To:** Toronto Public Library Board

**From:** City Librarian

**SUMMARY**

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The purpose of this report is to seek Toronto Public Library Board approval of a Food and Alcohol Policy (Attachment 1). The policy consolidates existing practices, replaces the Alcohol Policy (2002) (Attachment 2), and recommends an amendment to the Community and Event Space Rental Policy.

The policy establishes consistent, system-wide requirements for how food and alcohol may be provided, served, and consumed in Library programs, events, and rentals. This ensures clarity for staff, external presenters, collaborators, renters, and customers while reinforcing Toronto Public Library's (TPL) commitment to safe, inclusive, and welcoming public spaces. The policy will modernize TPL's framework for managing food and alcohol, reduce health and safety risks through allergy-aware practices, and ensure compliance with public health and legislative requirements.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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**The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:**

1. approves the Food and Alcohol Policy, appended as Attachment 1;
2. rescinds the Alcohol Policy (2002), appended as Attachment 2; and
3. amends the Community and Event Space Rental Policy, to clarify that alcohol is not permitted in community space rentals during library hours, and any exceptions for after-hours must be approved.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There is no financial impact beyond what has been approved in the current year's budget.

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

## ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

The policy advances TPL's Strategic Plan 2025-2029 priorities of Social Connection, Civic Engagement and Democracy, Shared Community Spaces, and Learning and Growth. The policy reinforces TPL's commitment to safe, inclusive, and equitable access to library spaces and services, consistent with TPL's Equity Statement and Programming Policy. By establishing consistent, system-wide requirements that govern how food and alcohol may be provided, served, and consumed, the policy strengthens TPL's role as a trusted community space, reduces risk through allergy-aware practices, and equips staff, external presenters, collaborators, and renters, with the knowledge and tools needed to deliver safe, high-quality programs and events.

## EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Food and Alcohol Policy is expected to have a positive equity impact. The policy reduces barriers for people with allergies and individuals with religious or cultural dietary practices by requiring ingredient transparency and adopting an allergy-aware approach. These measures support informed decision-making and safe participation in library programs and events.

## DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on April 25, 2022, the Library Board considered the report [Toronto Public Library's Policy Development Framework](#) and approved TPL's Policy Development Framework, which sets out how policies are developed, reviewed and approved for TPL.

At its meeting on January 19, 2009, the Library Board received for information the report [Eating and Drinking in the Library](#);

At its meeting on September 23, 2002, the Library Board approved the [Alcohol Policy report](#).

## ISSUE BACKGROUND

TPL delivers a high volume of programs and services that include food (e.g., After School Clubs; Youth Hubs; external-led culinary workshops; refreshments at adult and senior programs). Alcohol may also be present at some programs and in rentals. While providing food can enhance engagement and community-building, it also creates obligations around food safety, allergy management, alcohol service, and consistent communication with customers and partners.

Historically, TPL has not had a single overarching policy that addresses both food and alcohol in programs and rentals. The existing Alcohol Policy (2002) is limited in scope and does not reflect the full range of current practices. Internal consultations have highlighted the uncertainty amongst staff about roles and responsibilities, challenges in managing allergy risks, and inconsistencies across the system.

The Food and Alcohol Policy responds to these issues by consolidating the 2002 Alcohol Policy, amending the Community and Event Space Rental Policy, and codifying existing practices. By establishing clear system-wide requirements, the policy reduces organizational risk and supports TPL's commitment to providing safe, inclusive, and welcoming spaces.

The Community and Event Space Rental Policy does not explicitly address the use of alcohol in community room and theatre rentals despite standards being in place. If approved, the recommendation to amend this policy will result in the addition of the clarification that alcohol is not permitted in community space rentals during library operating hours, with exceptions considered on a case-by-case basis and subject to approval, to align with the new Food and Alcohol Policy.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Need for a Consolidated Policy**

Food and alcohol are part of many library programs, events, and rentals. Until now, TPL has relied on the Alcohol Policy (2002) and documented guidelines and staff practices to manage food in programs. As food in programming has expanded, the need for more clarity, accountability, and consistency was identified. A consolidated policy is required to provide clear system-wide direction.

### **Consultation to Date**

Consultation included broad representation across TPL, including staff and managers from across divisions as well as several service committees. The process ensured that the policy was grounded in the realities of day-to-day program delivery and branch operations.

### **Environmental Scan**

A scan of more than 45 Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) members and municipal policies found few formal policies covering food and alcohol in

programs and rentals. Most only address general customer consumption. Alcohol is typically governed through rental processes or municipal regulation. This policy addresses these gaps by establishing clear, system-wide requirements and positioning TPL as a leader among Canadian public libraries.

## **Expected Results**

The Food and Alcohol Policy will:

- establish consistent, system-wide requirements with defined responsibilities for staff, presenters, collaborators, and renters;
- reduce organizational risk through allergy-aware practices and compliance with legislative requirements;
- enhance program quality and participant safety;
- support staff learning and growth with training, guidance, and resources; and
- create clear and uniform guidelines for food and alcohol use across all venue and community rental spaces ensuring clarity for all renters.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Moe Hosseini-Ara  
City Librarian

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Attachment 2: Alcohol Policy

Policy Title: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Policy Classification: Board Policy

## **Food and Alcohol Policy**

### **Policy Classification: Board Policy**

### **Motion # and Approval Date:**

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### **Purpose**

Toronto Public Library (TPL or the Library) is committed to providing welcoming, inclusive, and safe environments for all Library customers. As food and drink have become more common in library programs and events, and as alcohol may be served at designated venue spaces, it is necessary that the Library establish consistent, system-wide expectations that remain responsive to evolving programming, legal, and public health contexts.

The purpose of the Food and Alcohol Policy is to outline the requirements that govern how food and alcohol may be provided, served, and consumed during Library programs, events, and rentals. This policy is intended to support consistent practices that reduce risk, promote health, accountability, and a positive customer experience.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- Ensure consistent and clear expectations for the safe handling, service, and use of food and alcohol in TPL spaces;
- Reduce risk by outlining requirements for food safety, allergy awareness, and alcohol service;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities for TPL staff, external presenters, collaborators, renters, and customers; and
- Align with relevant legislative and public health standards.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all public-facing TPL programs, events, and space rentals where food or alcohol may be provided, served, or consumed.

Policy Title: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Policy Classification: Board Policy

This policy applies to:

- TPL staff and volunteers involved in the planning or delivery of programs and events;
- External presenters, collaborators, or organizations working with TPL to deliver programs; and
- Alcohol service in venue and community space rentals under the Community and Event Space Rental Policy.

This policy does not apply to:

- Individual customers consuming their own food and beverage in Library spaces, as this is addressed through the Rules of Conduct Policy;
- Staff-only areas and internal TPL events;
- Food dispensed through vending machines; and
- Food served by renters in community space rentals. Renters are responsible for their own food safety practices and must comply with the Community and Event Space Rental Policy.

TPL may establish further operational guidelines to support the implementation of this policy.

TPL reserves the right to determine when this policy applies to specific activities or events, in accordance with applicable law and Library guidelines.

## **Underlying Principles**

This policy is driven by the principles defined in the Library's Values, Vision, and Mission, and in TPL's Equity Statement and Intellectual Freedom Statement.

Toronto Public Library is committed to maintaining a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for all Library customers. The Food and Alcohol Policy is grounded in the following core principles:

- TPL is committed to delivering safe, equitable, and inclusive services, including programs and events where food or alcohol may be provided,

Policy Title: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Policy Classification: Board Policy

served, or consumed.

- Food and alcohol may be included in public-facing services only when their use aligns with the Library's commitment to customer safety, equity, and accessibility.
- TPL is committed to maintaining the trust and safety of the public by taking steps to reduce risk, support transparency, and provide a safe and accountable public service environment.

## **Policy Statement**

Toronto Public Library offers a wide range of public-facing programs, events and space rentals. In some cases, food and alcohol may be served or consumed as part of programming and rentals. This policy establishes the rules that govern how food and alcohol may be provided, served, or consumed in these contexts.

This policy ensures a consistent and accountable approach across the Library. It outlines responsibilities for staff, volunteers, external presenters, collaborators, and renters, and supports allergy-aware practices that reduce risk and promote informed participation. It also establishes requirements for alcohol service at events or TPL programs held in designated venue spaces, in alignment with applicable legislation.

This policy promotes:

- Safe and equitable service delivery;
- Clear, enforceable expectations for all parties;
- Compliance with legislative requirements; and
- TPL's commitment to safety, inclusion, and public trust.

### **1. Allergy Aware Not Allergen-Free**

- 1.1. Toronto Public Library does not operate in allergen-free environments.
- 1.2. TPL follows an allergy aware approach, designed to reduce but not eliminate risk.
- 1.3. Primary source ingredient lists, including original product packaging, will be

Policy Title: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Policy Classification: Board Policy

made available to and shared with program participants during each program session.

- 1.4. This requirement applies to both consumptive and non-consumptive uses of food.
- 1.5. Customers and caregivers are responsible for managing their own food intake and allergy-related risks, and those of dependents in their care.
- 1.6. Participation in food-related programming is voluntary, and customers assume responsibility for making informed choices.

## **2. Food in Programs and Events**

- 2.1. TPL staff may include food in library programs when it supports the program's goals and meets all requirements outlined in this policy and related guidelines.
- 2.2. TPL staff must not prepare, cook, or assemble food for public consumption.
- 2.3. Food must be commercially prepared, pre-packaged for individual distribution, or prepared onsite under the supervision of a trained external presenter, in compliance with this policy.
- 2.4. Program descriptions and materials must clearly state when food will be provided, served, or offered.
- 2.5. Ingredient list requirements are outlined in the Allergy Aware section of this policy.

## **3. Alcohol Service**

- 3.1. Alcohol is permitted only at approved events with a valid alcohol permit as regulated by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO).
- 3.2. Alcohol service must be approved in advance by a designated representative from TPL's Venue Rentals Team.
- 3.3. Programs generally do not permit alcohol to be provided or served.
- 3.4. Alcohol is not permitted in community space rentals during library hours. Exceptions for after-hours community space rentals must be approved by designated staff.
- 3.5. All programs and events involving alcohol must be organized by TPL's Venue Rental team. The team provides guidance and oversight to ensure compliance with all AGCO regulations and requirements.
- 3.6. Designated TPL staff must verify that all documents and requirements have

Policy Title: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Policy Classification: Board Policy

been met before the program or event takes place.

- 3.7. Failure to meet these requirements will result in cancellation of alcohol service. TPL reserves the right to cancel or deny approval for any program or event that does not comply with this policy.
- 3.8. TPL and the City of Toronto shall bear no liability for any claims, damages, or incidents arising from the service or consumption of food and alcohol. Event organizers and permit holders are solely responsible for compliance with legislation and assume full legal liability.
- 3.9. Staff are not permitted to consume alcohol while on duty at library events. This restriction applies regardless of whether alcohol is being served to event participants.

#### **4. External Presenters and Collaborators**

- 4.1. External presenters, collaborators, and organizations participating in programs must follow TPL's allergy-aware approach. Food menus must be finalized and provided to TPL in advance of the first program date.
- 4.2. Programs must indicate if food or drink is being provided, served, or consumed.
- 4.3. External presenters, collaborators, and organizations delivering programs involving food must ensure that any staff or volunteers handling food are trained to recognize and respond to the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis.
- 4.4. Ingredient list requirements are outlined in the Allergy Aware section of this policy.
- 4.5. Failure by presenters or collaborators to meet the requirements of this policy may result in program cancellation.

#### **5. External Renters**

- 5.1. Programs or events hosted by external individuals or organizations on TPL premises are governed by the Community and Event Space Rental Policy.
- 5.2. Alcohol is not permitted in community space rentals during library hours. Exceptions for after-hours community space rentals may be considered on a case-by-case basis and must receive prior approval from a designated library representative.
- 5.3. Alcohol may only be served at programs or events held in designated venue

Policy Title: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Policy Classification: Board Policy

spaces, subject to the conditions outlined in the “Alcohol Service” section of this policy.

5.4. TPL does not regulate or oversee food provided by renters in community space rentals. Renters in community spaces are solely responsible for food safety and compliance with public health regulations. Venue rentals must use TPL approved caterers for food and beverage services.

## **6. Staff Training**

6.1. TPL is committed to ensuring that staff have the knowledge and skills to safely manage food and alcohol in public facing services.

## **Accountability**

The Director of Service Development and Innovation has overall accountability for programming as a service pillar.

The Directors are accountable for ensuring compliance with the Programming Policy in their respective areas.

## **Related Legislation**

- [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, 2005 \(AODA\)](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Code](#)
- [Liquor Licence and Control Act, 2019 \(Ontario\)](#)

## **Related Library Policies**

- [Community and Event Space Rental Policy](#)
- [Display and Distribution of Information to the Public Policy](#)
- [Programming Policy](#)
- [Reconciliation Statement](#)
- [Rules of Conduct Policy](#)
- [Toronto Public Library Equity Statement](#)
- [Toronto Public Library Intellectual Freedom Statement](#)

Policy Title: Food and Alcohol Policy  
Policy Classification: Board Policy

## Related Standards, Procedures, and Guidelines

- [Toronto Public Library Service Delivery Model \(PDF\)](#)

## Definition of Terms

**Allergy Aware** - Refers to the state of being knowledgeable and proactive in managing allergies, particularly food allergies.

**Anaphylaxis** - A severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction that is rapid in onset and may cause death.

**Collaborative Program** - A collaborative program is a type of collaboration with an external organization. The collaboration can be a one-time program, one-time series, or ongoing program or series.

**External Presenter** - An individual, group, or organization delivering programs with Toronto Public Library.

**External Renter** - An individual, group, or organization that rents library space under the Community and Event Space Rental Policy.

**Primary Source Ingredient List** - The complete list of ingredients provided by the manufacturer or producer on the original product packaging.

**Personal Consumption** - Eating or drinking your own food while you are in the library. This is covered by the library's Rules of Conduct.

**Program** - Defined as an event having a presentation component and lasting 30 minutes or longer. A program could be a single event or a series of events, be a scheduled or a pop-up event, take place inside or outside of a branch, or take place online.

## Contact

Director, Service Development and Innovation

**POLICY:** **ALCOHOL**

**SECTION:** **II – General Policies – Miscellaneous**

**MOTION#/DATE:** **02 - 148 – September 23, 2002**

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Groups intending to serve alcohol on Library premises are required to:

- obtain prior permission from a designated representative of the Library;
- secure a Special Occasion Permit from the Liquor Control Board of Ontario;
- have sufficient security on duty obtained through the Library; and
- abide by the procedures and regulations of the Liquor License Act.

The individuals serving alcohol must provide documentation that they have completed the Smart Serve Training Program.

The permit holders for all Special Occasion Permit events taking place in the Library (except where the event is a bona fide Toronto Public Library corporate occasion) are required to obtain third party liability insurance which sets a \$2,000,000 minimum per occurrence limit, or an amount set by the Library, and identifies the Library as an additional insured with respect to the permitted event.

