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STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Bridge Platform – Extension of Contract

Date: June 23, 2025

To: Toronto Public Library Board

From: City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Toronto Public Library Board approval to extend and increase the total value of the contract with Thinksmart Technologies FC LLC for the Bridge platform. The contract includes software licensing, monthly hosting, ongoing enhancements, and technical support.

The Bridge platform is a custom designed technology platform that enables Ontario public libraries to demonstrate the impact of their digital inclusion services by collecting, assessing and visualizing standardized outcome measurement data. It is managed by Toronto Public Library on behalf of participating Ontario public libraries, and fully funded by the Ontario Government.

The current contract with Thinksmart Technologies FC LLC was awarded as a non-competitive procurement process with an approved contract value of approximately \$500,000 for the term of January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2025. The total potential value of the increase to the contract is \$490,000 for three one-year extensions from January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2028. The total

revised contract value will be \$990,000 which includes the current contract and the extensions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. approve a contract extension and increase to the commitment with Thinksmart Technologies FC LLC for Bridge platform hosting, licensing, technical support and enhancements for a total estimated value of \$490,000 which increases the value of the contract from \$500,000 to \$990,000 for the period January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2028.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The value of the increased commitment with Thinksmart Technologies FC LLC is \$490,000. The funding for the contract is included in the annual grant funding from the Province of Ontario. Therefore, the increased commitment will have zero net impact on the TPL budget for the remainder of the contract term.

The total value of the commitment with Thinksmart Technologies FC LLC is \$990,000, excluding HST, which is comprised of the:

- Original contract awarded under City Librarian's authority for an approximate value of \$295,000 for a two-year period from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2023;
- Extension of contract under City Librarian's authority for \$205,000 for a revised contract value of \$500,000 from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2025;
- Requested increase to current contract of \$70,000 for hosting and platform enhancements; and
- Requested contract extension for a value of \$420,000 from January 1, 2026 to December 31, 2028 which includes both monthly hosting and platform enhancements.

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

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

The Bridge platform supports TPL's Strategic Priority of Learning and Growth and the objective of helping to bridge the digital divide with new and emerging technologies, as well as equipping staff with the skills they need to support the development of digital literacy. It further supports the Digital Strategy priority of enabling Data-Informed Decisions by providing meaningful and actionable data on the impact of the Library's digital inclusion and technology access services, and the evolving needs of customers.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Public libraries play a critical role in advancing digital inclusion and bridging the digital divide which disproportionately affects equity deserving groups. The Bridge platform provides valuable data and insights about the impact of library technology services. It also integrates the City's Data for Equity Guidelines and supports the collection of socio-demographic data and analysis of disaggregated data to help inform more equitable program planning and service delivery. The data and insights from the Bridge platform supports TPL's goal of understanding and breaking down barriers to access and ensuring inclusion and advocating for the role of the library in bridging the digital divide.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of January 29, 2024, the Board received for information the report [Impact of Technology Services in Ontario Public Libraries: Bridge 2021/2022 Report – Toronto Public Library Results](#) which provided an overview of the patron survey results that demonstrated the continued impact that TPL has in enhancing digital literacy and increasing equitable access to technology.

At its meeting of February 26, 2018, as part of an update on the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan, the Board considered [an update on the implementation of the Bridge Technology Assessment Toolkit](#) to help libraries understand and demonstrate how technology services directly benefit residents and communities.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In 2016, Toronto Public Library (TPL) contacted with Nordicity Group Ltd. to assess the technology service needs of Ontario libraries and develop a pilot technology services assessment data platform. A pilot implementation was launched in 2017 with participation from eight libraries, and results were documented in the report [Technology Access in Public Libraries: Outcomes and Impacts for Ontario Communities](#). The purpose was to develop a platform to enable Ontario libraries to easily assess the need for technology services in their communities, measure the outcomes of the technology services they deliver, and benchmark those services and outcomes against their peers across the province. The contract with Thinksmart was initiated in 2022 to continue to develop and maintain the Bridge platform beyond the pilot. Toronto Public Library coordinates implementation of the Bridge platform through the vendor on behalf of participating Ontario public libraries, with funding provided by the Ontario government.

Developed in response to sector-wide feedback from the collaborative pilot, as well as ongoing consultation with participating Ontario libraries, the Bridge platform is custom designed to address a longstanding gap in the availability of data tools tailored to the unique needs of Ontario public libraries. Its continued relevance has led to increasing adoption across the province, with over 60 libraries now participating.

COMMENTS

The purpose of this report is to seek Toronto Public Library Board approval to extend and increase the total value of the contract with Thinksmart Technologies FC LLC for the Bridge platform. The contract includes software licensing, web hosting, technical support and ongoing platform enhancements. The pricing model for the current contract remains highly competitive and represents exceptional value for custom development and hosting of a web-based platform with the range of functionality that Bridge provides. The Bridge platform has been developed as a customized solution based on the ongoing input and consultation feedback from participating libraries to meet the specific needs of the Ontario library sector. It continues to meet all of the requirements established by TPL and participating libraries. In addition, the vendor's deep knowledge of the highly customized platform, given

their involvement in its development, ensures efficiency and stability of the service provided to more than 60 Ontario libraries. The cost of the Bridge platform is fully funded by the Ontario provincial government.

The award of this contract award and extension is being made in accordance with TPL Purchasing Policy section 6 – Non-Competitive Solicitations.

The contract extension will ensure that the Bridge platform continues to be available to all participating Ontario libraries. The recommended contract is for two years starting December 1, 2026, with the option for an additional one-year extension. During this period, TPL will explore options for future delivery of the Bridge platform that will enable long-term sustainability and flexibility of the service, including options for moving to an in-house staff support model. A phased review process will focus on technical documentation and knowledge transfer between the vendor and TPL ITS staff related to the platform's architecture, data flows, and enhancement processes. This will enable identification of recommendations for a future support model and/or options for procurement beyond 2028.

The Bridge platform plays a critical role in supporting Ontario public libraries with the collection, analysis, and reporting of data related to digital inclusion and technology access. Currently 60 Ontario public libraries rely on the Bridge platform, and the number continues to grow each year. TPL provides leadership to support the Bridge platform provide-wide as part of its mandate under the Ontario Public Libraries Act as a special library services board designated to provide library services to the Ontario library community on behalf of the provincial government.

As the need for outcome-focussed approaches that demonstrate the value of public library services continues to grow, ongoing support from the Bridge platform is essential. The proposed contract extension will ensure it remains responsive, scalable, and sustainable, and will enable the continued delivery of high-quality service and innovation for Ontario libraries.

CONTACT

Shawn Mitchell, Director, Policy, Planning and Performance Measurement; Tel: 416-395-5602; Email: smitchell@tpl.ca

Steve Till-Rogers, Director, Digital Strategy & CIO; Tel: 416-395-5577; Email: stillrogers@tpl.ca

SIGNATURE

Vickery Bowles
City Librarian