

Focus on

First Nation Public Libraries

In Ontario

A Resource Document for Chief and Council

Aaniin, Boozhoo, Kwey, Tansi, She:kon, and Hello!

The purpose of this handout is to brief you on governance matters associated with public library service in Ontario. It will also remind you that supporting First Nation public libraries can help you achieve your community's diverse priorities.

Public Libraries in the 21st Century

Today's public library is a community service that benefits everyone. Public library experiences change lives and strengthen communities in important ways. Increasingly, public libraries throughout Ontario are becoming vibrant, safe gathering places where elders, adults, teens, children – individually and together – come to attend events, pursue recreational interests, research, study, and simply enjoy meeting and connecting with one another.

Books and So Much More!

If you haven't visited your community's public library recently, then you may not realize that it has the potential to be one of the best used resources in the community, meeting a variety of needs. In a typical First Nation public library, you could find:

- Elders accessing up-to-date health information
- Conversationalists learning the community's traditional language
- Young families selecting books for bedtime reading
- Crafters demonstrating and learning traditional skills
- Adults consulting bestseller lists and children sharing book recommendations
- Teens and adults using public access computers for online education programs and learning about employment opportunities
- Visitors checking e-mail and learning about the community's history

“Contemporary library facilities are living rooms away from home, and gathering places for community groups. They don't just hold books, they hold communities together.”

Drew Hayden Taylor
Ojibwa author, humourist, and playwright

Turning Potential into Reality

Council advocacy and support is critical to a province-wide effort to improve First Nation public library conditions.

Our Way Forward: A Strategic Plan for Ontario First Nation Public Libraries identified six essential goals:

1. **Advocacy and Promotion** – To promote the importance and value of First Nation public libraries to our First Nations leadership organizations, federal and provincial funders, Chiefs and Councils, and communities.
2. **Funding** – To secure sustainable funding for First Nation public libraries.
3. **Staffing** – To enhance the delivery of public library services with a trained and stable work force responsive to the communities it serves and supported by Chiefs and Councils.
4. **Facilities** – To provide appropriate facilities to serve as public libraries and gathering places for people and community programs.
5. **Services** – To provide First Nation public library services that reflect the needs and interests of our communities, encourage literacy, promote a lifelong love of reading, learning, and cultural enrichment and demonstrate the power of community partnerships.
6. **Collections** – To ensure all First Nation communities have access to public library materials in a variety of formats that meet the diverse needs and interests of community members.

Public Library Legislation in Ontario

In Ontario, public libraries are regarded as a key element in the province's culture sector.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (the Ministry) is responsible for administering the *Public Libraries Act*, R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER P.44 (the *Act*) and the statutory grant program as prescribed under the *Act* as well as other public sector support programs delivered on behalf of the Ministry.

The *Act* is provincial legislation that gives an "Indian band" (the band) the power to establish a local public library. The *Act* recognizes the band as the First Nation public library's governing body. Once established, the Ministry makes a grant to the band for public library purposes [Payments to boards 30. (4)].

The *Act* also allows a band to enter into a contract for public library service with a neighbouring public library board, union board or county library board instead of establishing its own public library [Contract for services 29. (1)]. In such situations, the Ministry also makes a grant to the band for public library purposes [Payments to boards 30. (2)]. A member of a band that has contracted for public library service is qualified, subject to additional considerations, for appointment as a member to the board contracted with [Board members 10. (1)(c) (iv)].

The *Act*, prescriptive for municipalities, is permissive for bands. Municipal public libraries are governed by independent boards.

Band Obligations and Responsibilities

As the recipient of a grant for public library purposes, the band has the authority to enter into contracts, engage employees and contractors, and do the other things it deems necessary for the provision of service. It must also meet the Ministry's reporting requirements. [Powers and duties of a board 20 (f) and Contract for library services 29. Reports (2)].

While it usually benefits public library development for the public library to report directly to Chief and Council, a band that decides to transfer its public library obligations (e.g., to a committee or another program) should document the transfer formally in a Band Council Resolution and notify the Ministry accordingly.

"I ask everyone ... to ask themselves why – in such a wealthy country – there are only 48 First Nations in Ontario – out of over 130 – that have public libraries."

Maurice Switzer – Director of Communications, Union of Ontario Indians, and Editor, *Anishinabek News*

First Nation Public Libraries' Vision Statement

"Public libraries provide an essential service to First Nation communities.

"Our Chiefs and Councils lead our communities in recognizing and supporting our public libraries as vital contributors to growth and change.

"With current and culturally relevant collections and services, First Nation public libraries welcome all community members and support their needs for access to information, personal empowerment and self affirmation.

"In partnership with other community programs, our public libraries contribute to our social and economic well being by nurturing our spirits, preserving our traditions, cultures, and languages, and encouraging lifelong learning and literacy."

Our Way Forward: A Strategic Plan for Ontario First Nation Public Libraries



Chief Elizabeth Cloud signing the 2012 First Nations Public Library Week proclamation at the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation Public Library

Band Councils and Public Libraries Working Together

By working together, band councils and public libraries improve the chances of better providing responsive and innovative public library service that meets community needs. We encourage you to speak with your First Nation librarian about how Chief and Council can help your public library achieve the Ontario First Nation public libraries' vision.

Developing rapport can be beneficial on many levels, including but not limited to the:

- alignment of goals
- ongoing provision of information
- access to funding and consortia opportunities
- access to public library consultation services

A close relationship can result in the librarian becoming a valued member of the community planning team. This level of communication and collaboration serves the community well.

Public Library Service is Free

The Public Libraries Act specifies that most public library services be offered free of charge. A public library may not charge for admission or for use of its materials while in the library. The Act also prescribes an extensive list of material types that must be lent to users free of charge. Information services must also be free.

The band may impose fees for use of public services by non-residents and for room rental. The public library may also impose fees for programming, and overdue, damaged, and lost materials.

“We know that government spending is always in jeopardy and we need to find ways to justify investments that demonstrate we gain more and lose less by keeping our community library open and operational.

“There will come a time when we can and should make investments that seek to achieve higher learning and that continue to provide books, DVDs, and reference material that give us the power of knowledge.”

Chief Isadore Day, *Wiindawtegowinini*, Serpent River First Nation

How First Nation Public Libraries Are Funded

Currently, where operating First Nation public libraries exist, ongoing funding comes from their bands, the Ministry's Public Library Operating Grant (based on a formula of \$1.50 per capita), and the Ministry's Salary Supplement Grant (\$13,000) for the First Nation public library's librarian.

While the Ministry provides additional funding (e.g., Connectivity) when possible, such funding is not legislated, generally has project grant status, and tends to come with specific terms and conditions.

Progressive First Nation public libraries are those that:

- also have community support in terms of cash or in-kind contributions from council or other programs
- take full advantage of Ministry project grants when they're available
- respond, as possible, to other funding advantages and opportunities as they arise
- fundraise when there's an opportunity and staffing permits

It is good practice for every First Nation public library to prepare a budget based on information available about Ministry funding and, also, consultation with Council, community partners, and other potential funders. This process tends to work well as it identifies spending parameters, supports the wise and prudent use of dollars, and provides for necessary accountability.

Of course, the level of funding First Nation public libraries receive has a direct effect on staffing, staff continuity, service quality, and the state of the public library collection.

In summary, 21st century public library service is not possible without a strong advocacy and funding commitment on the part of band councils. You can support your public library by assisting in developing a solid financial plan, by applying for and accepting grants from the Ministry, and, most importantly, by promoting your public library to your community--the more that people in your community know about your public library, the more they will be able to make use of its services.

Are You Aware that ...

On June 16, 2004, the **Chiefs of Ontario** adopted Resolution 04/20 supporting, in principle, First Nations utilization of *Our Way Forward: A Strategic Plan for Ontario First Nation Public Libraries?*

On December 11, 2011, the **Assembly of First Nations** adopted Resolution 49/2011 encouraging First Nation communities to:

- assist in creating and sustaining their own public libraries
- support the need for federal funding dedicated specifically for ongoing operations of First Nation public libraries?

Help Your Community Thrive in a Changing World

The public library helps communities achieve:

- a strong sense of community identity and well-being
- an appreciation of and passion for storytelling, literature, and illustration
- a level playing field for literacy, lifelong learning, and technology access
- informed and involved community members
- skilled workers
- community members of all ages creatively engaged

In the 21st century, communities cannot afford to be without good public library service. As a community role model and leader who contributes to key decision-making, you can help strengthen your community by strengthening its public library. Here are some strategies:

- visit your public library regularly and bring someone with you
- “talk up” your public library to council colleagues and community members
- attend and support public library events
- respect your librarian as a program manager
- involve your librarian in community planning
- learn more about your public library’s contribution to your community
- support your public library’s developmental needs
- engage actively in the movement to advocate for sustainable First Nation public library funding

The Importance of Intellectual Freedom

Universal access to information and intellectual freedom are fundamental human rights and cornerstones of a functioning democracy. The public library is committed to protecting these rights by making it possible for all members of society to access and use information and ideas.

For More Information:

- **The Public Libraries Act**
http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90p44_e.htm
- **Public Libraries Act, R.R.O. 1990, REGULATION 976**
http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_900976_e.htm
- **Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Public Libraries**
<http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca/en/libraries/libraries.shtml>
- **Public Library Operating Grant/Pay Equity Program/First Nation Salary Supplement**
http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca/en/awards_funding/lib_operating_grant.shtml
- **Our Way Forward**
http://www.ourwayforward.ca/Downloads/First_Nation_Strat_Plan.pdf
- **Speak Up for First Nation Public Libraries Campaign**
<http://www.speakuptoday.net/>
- **First Nation Public Library Guidelines**
<http://fopl.ca/accreditation-council/> (scroll down)

And, of course, you’ll want to check out your public library’s website – or help it develop one!

Chi miigwech, niawen, and thank you.



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