

The 21st Century Public Library

- A briefing for municipal managers in Ontario

The Challenges of a Changing World

These are uncertain times. The world is changing in significant ways. Technology alone is responsible for enormous shifts in the nature of work and in how we do most things. We know that the rise of a digital, knowledge economy requires a workforce with new skills and abilities. This includes the ability to adapt and engage in continuous learning. At the same time, there remains a significant segment of the population without access to the Internet or the computer skills they need to participate in the new economy.

Other forces of change include an aging population, growing cultural diversity, increased urban density, ever greater social inequities, a smaller workforce, a diminished tax base, and a fluctuating world economy.

Public Library Outcomes Aligned with Municipal Priorities

As a municipal manager, you know the impact of these changes on the community you serve. Along with other levels of government, today's municipal leaders are charged with the daunting task of building strong communities against a backdrop of social and economic turbulence.

The 21st century public library is well-positioned to contribute to your municipality's efforts to build a healthy, resilient, and sustainable community. Regardless of the particular challenges facing your community, the public library can be part of the solution and play an important role in supporting municipal strategies.

Traditionally recognized for books and children's programming, the public library has evolved. Today it is a cornerstone of the community that benefits everyone. The public library:

- Facilitates individual and community learning, building capacity to adapt to a changing world
- Enables participation by all in an increasingly digital economy
- Fosters creativity, widely endorsed as an essential life skill in the new economy
- Supports workforce readiness
- Engages the minds of an aging population, slowing cognitive decline
- Builds newcomers' capacity to be active and involved members of the community
- Provides crucial public space that supports community engagement and reduces social isolation
- Showcases and generates enthusiasm for local culture and identity
- Contributes to a community's appeal as a vibrant place to live.

Ontario residents rely on the public library to provide what they need to face the future with the resilience that comes from new knowledge, information, skills, and abilities. It is not a stretch to say that your community cannot afford to be without good public library service.

Ontario boasts close to 78 million visits to its public libraries.

- 5 million Ontario residents have active library cards
- 3 million residents of all ages attend library programs every year
- 124.5 million items are borrowed every year
- 10,825 public computer workstations and thousands of online resources are available in public libraries across the province.

Statistics taken from 2010 Ontario Public Library Statistics. Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. www.mtc.gov.on.ca

Boards and Councils Working

Together The significant community benefits of public libraries are only possible because of responsible stewardship by library boards and the enduring commitment of municipalities, aided by the Province of Ontario. By working together, library boards and municipal councils provide responsive and innovative library service that meets the needs of Ontario residents.

“Libraries and municipalities are natural partners. We respect the Board’s legal autonomy, but recognize that we serve the same community and have compatible objectives. Wherever possible – in formulating budgets, in developing policies, or in delivering programs – we work together to provide value-added service to our customers.”

~ Don Boyle, CAO, Haldimand County

Public Library Governance in Ontario

The *Public Libraries Act*, R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER P.44 (the *Act*) is provincial legislation that gives a municipality the power to establish a local public library. Once established, the library is governed by a board appointed by municipal council. The Library Board is a separate, independent corporation with the legal duty to oversee all aspects of library service.

At the first meeting in its new term, Council is required to appoint a minimum of five members to the Board, some of whom, but not a majority, may be elected officials (a bare majority is allowed with county systems). Appointment of qualified individuals and ongoing Council representation on the Board form the basis for an important partnership between the library and the municipality.

The *Act* requires that the Board appoint a treasurer who shall receive, account for, deposit and disburse the money as directed by the Board. Some of the library’s financial operations, such as payroll, may be integrated into the municipality’s financial systems, provided all legal requirements are met

The Library Board is the employer of all library staff. This includes the library’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The appointment of a CEO by the Library Board is a requirement of the legislation.

For more information about the *Act*, see the brochure, “Understanding Ontario’s Public Libraries Act” available on the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport website.

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 the information and ideas they need to conduct their lives.

Public Library Funding

Municipal taxpayers are the primary source of operating funds for public libraries in Ontario. Provincial grants do not make up a large portion of most boards’ revenue.

The *Act* specifies that most library services must be offered free of charge. This requirement makes the library different from other community services which may generate revenue in the form of user fees.

In summary, 21st century public library service is not possible without a strong commitment on the part of Ontario’s municipalities. Ontario residents and communities rely on this strong commitment.

For more information:

The Public Libraries Act www.e-laws.gov.on.ca

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport www.mtc.gov.on.ca

Southern Ontario Library Service www.sols.org

Ontario Library Service-North www.olsn.ca

Ontario Library Boards’ Association www.accessola.com/olba

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries www.fopl.ca

And, of course, you’ll want to check out your local library’s website.

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