

## Annual Report of Public Libraries 2010

### Issues Facing the Public Library Sector

Libraries today are much different from those of decades past. Today's libraries are community hubs filled with valuable digital information and equipped with technology that citizens can use to empower themselves and attain personal goals. Information, equipment, services, and facilities must constantly be updated to keep pace with the new generation of users with fundamentally different needs. Public Libraries face a number of issues:

- Supporting government priorities
- Meeting users' needs in the face of shrinking funding
- The increasing need for infrastructure funding
- The long term impact of increasing technology
- Serving the needs of a population increasing in diversity
- Increasing the provincial government's awareness of the strategic role of public libraries.

### Response to Government Priorities

Public libraries appreciate the priorities of provincial and municipal governments and have responded by offering extensive programs in the following areas:

- **Economic development** by supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs with the provision of resources such as e-databases on market trends and information on relevant legislation, so that they can drive local economic recovery and job creation
- **Employment** by providing resources for career planning, job search and upgrading skills
- **Integration of new Canadians** by helping newcomers to Canada succeed through settlement support, language acquisition, employment support and maintaining cultural connections
- **Early literacy development** by facilitating success in the school system through their vast array of pre-school and children's literacy programs
- **Efficient government services** by serving as the first point of contact for information and referral on community and government programs, and
- **Cultural vitality** by feeding the community's cultural framework, which is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility, and economic viability.

#### Did you know?

*Ontario boasts 67 million visits a year to its public libraries.*

- *Over 92% of Ontarians have access to public library service*
- *425 municipalities offer public library service through 1,093 service outlets*
- *4.9 million Ontario residents have active library cards*
- *115.5 million items are borrowed every year*
- *9,883 public computer workstations and hundreds of online resources are available in public libraries across the province<sup>1</sup>.*

## Sustainable Operating Funding

On average only 5% of public library operating budgets is currently funded by the province. Public

*Public Libraries:  
More cardholders than VISA;  
More items than FedEx;  
More outlets than  
McDonald's*

libraries must rely increasingly on municipal funding to support their operations, resulting in significant variation in service levels across the province. At the municipal level, the competition for funds that libraries experience with other local priorities such as policing, social services and health care, has become unhealthy. And for the majority of Ontario's 52 First Nation libraries, the provincial operating grant is the only funding they receive, because their communities do not have a taxation system.

Sustainable operating funding would help fulfil the mandate of the Public Libraries Act, designed to ensure equitable access to services regardless of where Ontarians reside. Free access to information helps create "informed decisions", which are key to our democracy and the reason public libraries garner tremendous public support.

## Growing Need for Infrastructure Funding

There are 1093 public library branches throughout Ontario, many of which are in historic buildings with inadequate space, accessibility, heating, air conditioning and security systems. In particular, provincial legislation such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is putting extraordinary financial pressures on public libraries.

An infrastructure fund designated just for public libraries would facilitate the huge infusion of infrastructure dollars required by the public library sector. Investing in public libraries is important to Ontario's future and must not be overlooked.

## Long Term Impact of Increasing Technology

Technology facilitates a collection in diverse formats which then demand the development of innovative library procedures; for example, the digitization of historical photo collections results in much greater access, and requires new rules for accessing –not necessarily borrowing, and new devices for viewing and sharing.

Libraries have to adapt not only to new services they provide, but also tailor to the demands, devices and software that users provide. Students, seniors, business people, tutors and teens expect collaborative areas with wireless internet access, sprawl space and connectivity for laptops, and study corners.

The rise in mobile technology and practical application of mobile devices and the demand for instant, free and up-to-date information have libraries continually re-defining library service and library spaces. Libraries are redefining themselves by providing services that are customer-driven, interactive, and facilitated and enhanced by technology.

### Public Library Utilization

- *Everyday 13,000 Ontarians get job-seeking help at their public library.*<sup>1</sup>
- *120,000 times each month, Ontario business owners and employees use resources at public libraries to support their small businesses.*<sup>1</sup>
- *66.5 million visits are made in person to Ontario public libraries each year...more than 3 times the annual attendance at all North American NHL hockey games.*<sup>2,3</sup>
- *10,464 employees and 13,938 volunteers work at Ontario public libraries.*<sup>2</sup>
- *In Ontario, there are 2 public library branches for every 3 Tim Hortons outlets.*<sup>4</sup>

1. *Estimate based on OCLC report on US public libraries, "How Libraries Stack Up: 2010".*
2. *Ontario Library Statistics 2007, Ministry of Tourism and Culture*
3. *ESPN 2009-2010 NHL Attendance*
4. *2010 Statistics, Tim Hortons Customer Service*

### The Pressures of Diversity

Libraries are responding to the needs of the entire spectrum of the population, a population diverse in culture, abilities and technology.

Libraries have always played a key role in preserving and sharing the heritage, history and uniqueness of a community. "Culture" is the new buzz word in municipalities, and many public libraries are integral partners in the municipal cultural planning process. Libraries are leaders in resource sharing – something that many organizations are trying to emulate in their own business models.

Equitable access has always been a public library value, but the recent accessibility legislation has increased the pressure to accommodate users with various physical, visual and mental challenges, in facilities never designed for modern use.

In addition to adapting building, collection and services to serve diverse needs, now a new generation of "users" are virtual, downloading e-books, searching a vast array of databases, browsing genealogy information, reviewing historical photos, and registering for programmes without ever stepping foot in the building.

With shrinking funding, aging infrastructure and inadequate technology, libraries struggle to maintain their role as open to all and free to all.

### Inter-Ministerial Awareness of the Strategic Role of Public Libraries

In 2007, the then Ministry of Culture eliminated the Library Services Unit and adopted a functionally based organizational structure where departments serve a variety of sectors. This restructuring and the resultant lack of specialized expertise in the library sector at a senior level within the Ministry has seriously eroded inter-ministerial awareness of the role that public libraries can play in broader provincial strategies.

For example, too often in the past, the voice of public libraries has been overlooked when the provincial government has set policies and programs related to literacy. Examples include Ontario Works, Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Centres and Best Start Child and Family Centres.

At present only two front line staff at the Ministry of Tourism and Culture are dedicated to public libraries. In contrast all other provincial departments in Canada have library services units, and many are part of ministries such as Education, Municipal Affairs or Community Services, enhancing the view that public libraries are essential, not soft services.

Public libraries are not simply cultural institutions. They have key roles to play in driving government priorities such as economic development, employment, early literacy development, healthy communities and efficient government services.

### **Advocacy for the Future**

Provincial operating grants have not been adjusted since 1996, when they were cut by 40%. The Federation is advocating that the total funding envelope for provincial annual operating grants to Ontario's 388 public and First Nation libraries be increased significantly to reflect the inflation rate and population growth since 1996 and to recoup the 40% cut.

There is also significant disparity in the way the provincial government allocates its current support to public libraries. On a per capita basis using 2006 census, provincial support ranges from \$0.59 per resident in communities such as Vaughan, which have seen significant population growth, to \$26.17 per resident in some cottage country communities which have few permanent residents. So the funding envelope for provincial grants not only needs a major increase, its distribution formula also needs an overhaul.

The Federation has developed a specific per capita formula that its membership supports, which will be recommended to the provincial government. If implemented, this funding formula would greatly strengthen the role of public libraries in ensuring healthy and engaged communities.

**The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries** is a not-for profit membership association established in 2005 to provide a single strong voice for public Libraries in Ontario to enhance library policies and programs. Its services focus on four strategic pillars: advocacy; marketing, research and consortia purchasing. The Federation's 200 member libraries represent organizations of all sizes and from all geographic regions, and are responsible for serving 78% of Ontario's population.