

## Spotlight on Ontario

# Public Libraries

## What you need to know as a municipal councillor

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### Congratulations!

Whether this is your first election to municipal office, or your fifth, on behalf of Ontario's public libraries, we thank you for giving your time and energy to your community. We wish you every success in your new responsibilities.

The purpose of this handout is to brief you on the governance of public library service in Ontario and the important role your local library plays in the life of your community. The public library can help you be successful in achieving your municipal priorities.

Today's public library is a community service that benefits everyone. It changes lives and strengthens communities in important ways. Increasingly, the public library is recognized as a vibrant community hub where residents study, research, attend events and simply enjoy gathering and connecting with one another.

### Much More than Books!

If you've not visited your local library recently, do so! You will witness one of the best used resources in the community, meeting a variety of needs:

- An unemployed man uses a library computer to update his resume and look for work
- A local entrepreneur uses the library's business information for research
- A newcomer learns English
- A student works at her laptop
- A new resident consults bulletin boards for community information
- A young family reads together.

Invisible to you will be the individuals accessing the library's online resources from their homes and offices. Far from replacing libraries, technology makes libraries more important than ever, offering crucial access to a world of information.

### Boards and Councils Working Together

These services are only possible because of responsible stewardship by Library Boards and the ongoing support 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 their community.

Ontario boasts 72 million visits a year to its public libraries.

- 99.5% of Ontarians have access to public library service
- 415 municipalities offer public library service through 1,141 service outlets
- 4.6 million Ontario residents have active library cards
- 125 million items are borrowed every year
- 12,000 public computer workstations and hundreds of online resources are available in public libraries across the province.<sup>1</sup>

Find out just how many residents in your municipality have library cards or visit the library on a regular basis. You will be pleasantly surprised!

“Whether you connect in person or online, your public library offers you enjoyment and resources unavailable anywhere else. The return on your investment is potentially unlimited!”

Nigel Bellchamber,  
Municipal Consultant & Former CAO

<sup>1</sup> Statistics taken from 2016 *Ontario Public Library Statistics*. Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport <http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca>.

# What is your role in providing public library service?

## Public Library Governance in Ontario

The Public Libraries Act, R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER P.44 (the Act) is provincial legislation that gives municipalities the power to establish a local public library. The Act also allows a municipality to enter into a contract for library service with a neighbouring public library board, instead of establishing its own library.

Once a public library is established, Municipal Council is then required to appoint members to the Public Library Board. Council and Board terms are concurrent.

At the first meeting in its new term, Council is required to appoint a minimum of five members to the Library Board, some of whom, but not a majority, may be elected officials; if it is a county system a bare majority may be councillors.

Appointment of qualified individuals and ongoing Council representation on the Library Board form the basis for an important partnership between Municipal Council and the Board.

## Appointments to the Library Board

The Act stipulates that members of the public must be given notice and the opportunity to apply for openings on the Library Board. The outgoing Library Board and library CEO can provide useful advice regarding the skills and experience needed. Council then makes the appointments.

The Library Board needs members who are representative of the community, committed to library service, and prepared for responsible stewardship and ongoing collaboration with Municipal Council.

Councillors appointed to the Library Board are key to maintaining a two-way flow of communication and a good working relationship between Board and Council. As a member of the Library Board, a Municipal Councillor has the same rights and responsibilities as any other member of the Library Board. At a Board meeting, a Municipal Councillor is obligated to vote as a member of the Library Board, not as a member of Council.

## Library Board Obligations and Responsibilities

Your Public Library Board is a separate, independent corporation with the legal duty to provide "a comprehensive and efficient public library service that reflects the community's unique needs" (PLA, 20a).

As such, the Library Board has the authority to enter into contracts, engage employees and contractors, and do the other things it deems necessary for the provision of library service.

The Public Libraries Act requires that the Board appoint a treasurer who shall receive, account for, deposit and disburse the money as directed by the Board. Some aspects of the library's financial operations, such as payroll, may be integrated into the municipality's financial systems, provided all legal requirements are met, including a separate bank account in the name of the Library Board.

The Library Board is required to hold regular meetings once a month for at least 10 months every year. Board meetings must be open to the public, unless a closed meeting is warranted as prescribed in the legislation.

“ In Haldimand County, we encourage a culture of organizational cooperation. 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



## The Board as Employer

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. The CEO has general supervision over and direction of the operations of the library and its staff, attends all Board meetings, and has other powers and duties as assigned by the Board.

Notwithstanding its autonomy, the Library Board and the municipality can benefit from a close relationship. Developing a rapport can be beneficial on many levels, including the sharing of policies, practices and procedures in such areas as physical and human resources. A close relationship can result in the library CEO being considered a valued member of the municipal management team. This does require that everyone understand that the CEO still reports to and takes direction from the Library Board. This level of communication and collaboration serves the community well.

## Library Service is Free

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

The Board may impose fees for use of library services by non-residents and for room rental.

This requirement to provide free public library service makes the library different from other community services which may generate revenue in the form of user fees.

## How Are Libraries Funded?

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

The Public Libraries Act gives Municipal Council absolute discretion over the amount of funds it provides. In effect, Council may control the Board's budget to the degree that it chooses.

Common practice is for Council to establish budget guidelines and for the Library Board to prepare a budget that reflects these guidelines. Council then approves, or amends and approves the budget, giving careful attention to the advice of its Library Board which will also have taken significant care in developing its budget. This process tends to work well, ensuring accountability and the wise and prudent use of tax dollars.

Should Council restrict its contribution, the Board's ability to find other revenue is extremely limited. Ontario public libraries do seek additional funding in the form of grants, Development Charges, and fundraising for enhancements and capital projects.

Public library boards also have a strong tradition of group purchasing, leading to significantly reduced costs.

In summary, 21st century library service is not possible without a strong commitment on the part of Municipal Council.

“In our community the library not only promotes literacy and maintains a high profile as a provider of educational, research and cultural services, it is also an economic engine and key partner in our municipal strategies.”

Chris Cummings,  
Smiths Falls Municipal Council

**As a member of Municipal Council, you have an important voice in determining the quality of public library service in your community. We encourage you to learn more about your local library and to lend your support to this vital community service.**





## Helping Communities Thrive in a Changing World

As someone who cares enough about your community to take on the demands of public life, you are, no doubt, aware of the enormous challenges facing communities in these uncertain times. An aging population and growing cultural diversity, the changing nature of economic development, and a diminished tax base, are just some of the forces making the future unpredictable.

Strong municipalities are key to Ontario's economic vitality. We need communities with healthy local economies and flourishing downtowns. Residents need access to coordinated workplace development programs, a variety of learning and retraining opportunities, and a robust technology infrastructure. Ontario needs communities that support small businesses and creative ventures.

Regardless of the particular challenges facing your community, the public library can play an important role in supporting municipal strategies that build and strengthen communities. It is not a stretch to say that communities cannot afford to be without good public library service.

The public library helps communities achieve:

- Informed and involved citizens
- Skilled workers
- Creatively engaged teens and young adults
- A level playing field for literacy, lifelong learning and access to technology
- An inclusive, culturally diverse society
- A strong sense of community identity and well-being.

Residents rely on the public library to provide what they need to be productive, engaged members of the community.

## 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.

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### For more information:

- [The Public Libraries Act](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca)  
[www.e-laws.gov.on.ca](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca)
- [Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport](http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca)  
[www.mtc.gov.on.ca](http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca)
- [Southern Ontario Library Service](http://www.sols.org)  
[www.sols.org](http://www.sols.org)
- [Ontario Library Service - North](http://www.olsn.ca)  
[www.olsn.ca](http://www.olsn.ca)
- [Ontario Library Boards Association](http://www.accessola.com)  
[www.accessola.com](http://www.accessola.com)
- [The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries](http://www.fopl.ca)  
[www.fopl.ca](http://www.fopl.ca)

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



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**Southern Ontario Library Service**

1 Yonge St., Suite 1504, Toronto, ON M5E 1E5

Toll Free: 1.800.387.5765 Tel: 416.961.1669

[www.sols.org](http://www.sols.org)

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