BRIEFING NOTE

Ontario Digital Public Library – Investment Scenarios

September 2023

Bridging the Digital Divide through Ontario's Public Libraries

- *Building a Digital Ontario* is the Ontario Government's ambitious strategy to make the province a world-leading digital jurisdiction.

- As part of this strategy, the Ontario Government has recognized the crucial importance of public libraries to broadband internet access, making a $4.8 million investment to install or upgrade broadband connectivity at over 100 public libraries across the province.

- Building on that critical foundation, it is the right time to take the next step to empower Ontarians with the online resources they need to succeed in the 21st century.

- Millions of Ontarians rely on local public libraries for 24/7 access to online resources, which support digital equity, job readiness, civic engagement, health empowerment, and improved access to literacy and numeracy supports.

- However, these resources are expensive, especially when purchased on a patchwork, library-by-library basis.

- Through an Ontario Digital Public Library (ODPL), Ontario's public libraries can deliver equitable access to a common set of online databases and e-learning resources to every Ontarian, regardless of where they live, with technology and digital literacy supports provided by library staff.

- Ontario can leverage existing infrastructure and staffing that already exists throughout public libraries to advance Ontario as a world-leading digital jurisdiction and deliver a positive impact for residents of every community across the province.

- By leveraging volume purchasing, the ODPL could provide digital resources at **a cost savings of up to 40%** when compared to a direct subscription by an average Ontario public library.

- The ODPL responds to post-pandemic patterns of work, study and education in Ontario and helps to advance and increase the impact of key Provincial strategies, including *Building a Digital Ontario, Ontario Onwards Action Plan,* and *Rebuilding Main Street*.

The Impact of an Ontario Digital Public Library

- According to 2021/22 survey data, 61% of technology users in the library indicate that the public library was their only access to digital technology.

  - 31% of respondents used digital resources through the library to develop employable skills.

- Public libraries and trained library staff can provide equitable access to important digital and in-person supports to all Ontarians in such areas as:

  - Workforce and career development to build employable skills;
  - Small business and entrepreneurship to support economic development;
  - Online government in an increasingly digital world; and
  - E-Learning in areas such as health and wellness, language skills and homework help to support lifelong learning.

- Many public libraries in Ontario, particularly in smaller, Francophone and First Nation communities, will be able to provide a suite of high-quality digital resources that they are otherwise unable to afford.

- Through digital resource savings generated by the ODPL, local public libraries will be able to re-invest in other local priorities and urgent needs.

ODPL – Provincial Investment Scenarios

- Different funding levels listed below provide incremental increases for access to online databases and e-learning products, based on library sector understanding of preferred/high-use resources, current subscription costs, and required technical support and maintenance.

- Each funding level provides all 310 public library systems and First Nations public libraries in Ontario with:

  - A suite of online resources for a full subscription year with unlimited, 24/7 and simultaneous access, and
  - Annual operating costs for staff, support and supplies.

- At each funding level, the breadth of resources provided substantially increases, while operating costs remain stable.

- The ODPL would be delivered seamlessly through local public library websites, with centralized support to coordinate and manage resources and operations.

Funding Level*	Number of Databases	Database Examples**
$10 million	14	General: • *Health and Small Business reference* • *Language learning* • *Consumer Reports* • *Legal forms and templates* • *Magazines and News in 70 languages* • *French e-books* • *Auto Repair* • *Genealogy* • *Self Publishing*
$15 million (recommended)	18	General and Advanced – all content listed above and: • *K-12 e-content* • *Live Tutoring* • *Resume and Job coaching*
$20 million	22	General, Advanced and Specialized - all content listed above and: • *Online learning courses, including business essentials* • *Wellness and personal development*

* *The three funding levels include funds for online databases as well as $780,000 for operational requirements including supplies, support materials and 5 full-time staff for training, technical support, outreach and digital content management for the ODPL.*

** *At the levels of investment outlined in the scenarios above, OLA/FOPL is not recommending that further investment in e-books be included in the ODPL due to borrowing limits/restrictions, and high purchasing costs. The funding would be more impactful and beneficial to a greater number of Ontarians when expended on online databases and e-learning resources.*