

# ONTARIO ELECTION ADVOCACY TOOLKIT 2025

Supporting Ontario's Public & School  
Libraries to Empower Local  
Communities



**ONTARIO ELECTIONS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT:**  
**Supporting Ontario’s Public & School Libraries to Empower Local Communities**

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## **Ontario is Going to the Polls this February**

The Ontario Provincial Election is a critical opportunity for the library sector to capture the attention of political parties and candidates & secure their support to address the critical gaps that continue to confront Ontario's libraries and the many individuals and families across the province that depend on them. The goal of our election engagement is to share the profound importance of libraries to empowering Ontario's local economic growth, the impact they have on our communities and students, and the issues that we as a sector are working on across Ontario.

Libraries are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource and community hubs. Millions of Ontarians rely on local libraries in their daily lives: to work, to learn, to connect to community and government services, and to find or train for a job. Libraries are far more than books and computers. They are a critical lifeline and safety net for Ontario's most vulnerable people, in large cities and small communities alike. Every day, libraries and library staff confront many of the most difficult challenges facing Ontarians: mental health, homelessness, equity for Indigenous and racialized communities, newcomer integration, and child & youth poverty.

For many First Nation communities, public libraries serve as an accessible gathering place and information sharing resource. They are deeply important to maintain a sense of community and to minimize social isolation in these communities, many of which are remote or face systemic social and economic challenges.

School libraries are at the heart of Ontario's schools, providing an important space where students (and their teachers!) have the tools and resources they need to succeed while pursuing the interests and passions to thrive in life and their future careers. School libraries are much more than books; they're constantly evolving to meet the needs of the students, giving students hands-on opportunities to exciting new technologies and skills that drive student achievement and develop career skills.

Recognizing and reinforcing that libraries are an essential part of Ontario's economic and education priorities, but that many who depend on them are still falling through the gaps, is the critical focus of our sector's pre-election engagement. Strengthening what currently works and building towards an even more sustainable future are all part of our ongoing engagement with the Ontario Government.

An important part of our election engagement this year includes connecting with candidates – many of whom will be part of the next government or legislature – on critical priority investments that will ensure that libraries can continue to fulfill their critical role across Ontario.

## **What Can You Do?**

With the guidance of sector expertise, we've defined key priorities, prepared briefing materials, engaged with the Ontario Government and opposition parties, and participated in the Pre-Budget Consultation process.

Now we need your help as well.

Reaching out to candidates during the election campaign – particularly with your local perspective – will provide a critical foundation to our post-election advocacy and engagement at Queen's Park. Building relationships locally will help us to open dialogue and build a foundation for working together effectively with elected representatives and their staff from both the government and opposition.

There are lots of ways that your library can engage in the upcoming election to make sure that libraries are recognized for their important contributions to our municipalities, First Nations, and schools:

- 1. Meet with Candidates or Campaign Staff.**
- 2. Write or email a letter / questionnaire to local Candidates.**
- 3. Engage through social media.**
- 4. Ask key questions at town hall meetings and all-candidates debates.**

## Important Guidelines to Ensure Success

### DOs

- **Consult your organization's leadership:** Before you engage your library in any advocacy or election-related activity, be sure that your leadership is on board.
- **Stay focused:** We are most effective when we have a clear and unified message on the necessity of increased support for libraries. OLA & FOPL have developed messaging for you to use in all your interactions with local candidates.
- **Be positive:** Libraries are vital to Ontario's economic growth and are providing critical services to communities across the province. Our engagement should position libraries as contributing non-partisan solutions to key provincial priorities – no matter where you live in Ontario.
- **Stay non-partisan:** Engage with and invite all candidates to participate, including independent candidates where appropriate.
- **Organize and be inclusive:** A well-organized meeting or event should be one where everyone is welcome. When appropriate, think about what people with barriers to participation need – and how you can help address these.
- **Prepare:** Do your homework. Your impact will be most significant when you're able to connect our overall messaging with your local perspective and insight.
- **Raise the profile of your events through social media:** Demonstrate what we already know – libraries get the digital world and new ways of communicating. Using social media is a great way to engage your local community, e.g., Facebook or Instagram posts.
- **Follow-up:** After a meeting or event, send thank-you letters, including a contact person for further questions.

### DON'Ts

- Focus only on engaging with one candidate or political party.
- Instruct or influence constituents as to which candidate or party to vote for.
- Ask for priorities that are outside the scope of the provincial government (i.e., federal or municipal government level issues). *\*See Appendix C for information on how libraries are funded.*
- Make partisan statements or endorse a candidate, for example by posting their campaign materials or photos on your website. (It's okay to post pictures of an all-candidates event that you host or attend!)

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS & EVENTS

While most MPP and candidate meetings or events will likely be held in-person, some may be conducted virtually through either Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet, depending on preference.

Here are some important reminders to consider when conducting virtual meetings:

- **Test your setup & arrive early**
- **Make time for introductions**
- **Stay muted unless speaking**
- **Protect sensitive information & turn off notifications**
- **Choose a neutral background & keep video on if possible**

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE NON-PARTISAN?

Partisan political activity is the direct or indirect promotion of a political candidate or party, or the direct or indirect opposition to a political party or candidate.

As representatives of the library sector, we want you to talk about and share information about our *non-partisan issues* - which do not favour or criticize a specific political party or candidate - and foster discussion about these important matters. We believe strongly that libraries positively impact a broad cross-section of Ontarians in every community across the province.

As a sector, we have and will continue to work collaboratively and constructively with representatives of all political parties to achieve meaningful change benefitting our libraries and communities. It's important to be aware of the rules around partisanship, but don't let these hinder your enthusiasm or participation. **Your voice is very important!**

## Engaging During Elections

You should reach out to and engage with candidates from all major parties in your local ridings. There are many effective ways to do this during the election period, including:

1. **Meet (virtually or in-person) with Candidates or Campaign Staff.**
2. **Write or email a letter / survey to local Candidates.**
3. **Engage through social media.**
4. **Ask key questions at town hall meetings and all-candidates debates.**

Remember, **all politics is local**. When meeting with your local candidates, focus on the key messages to convey the importance of your public and school libraries to the community, and give a local perspective about how maintaining sustainable funding and recent investments will benefit your libraries and community.

### 1. Meet with Candidates or Campaign Staff

Meeting with candidates and campaign staff during the election period is a great way to build a relationship and to educate them on the positive impacts of libraries and issues confronting the sector. Candidates want to get to know the important stakeholders in their communities – *that's you* – and will appreciate your local perspective and the opportunity to learn about how they can be a champion for your local libraries at Queen's Park.

#### **Engaging with local candidates and campaign staff will:**

- Provide an opportunity for more focused and in-depth conversations with a local perspective.
- Gauge how well candidates understand the issues facing libraries and respond to questions they may have.
- Build relationships with candidates that can continue to develop post-election, including developing champions for ensuring ongoing provincial support for libraries.

#### **Step 1: Scheduling and Preparing for a meeting**

- Enclosed in this toolkit is a **template meeting invitation** that you can use for your own local outreach.

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- OLA and FOPL staff will be able to provide you with the contact information you need for your MPP or candidate, as well as answer any questions you may have.
- **Be as accommodating as possible** in terms of making yourself available to meet with the MPP or candidate, for whatever length of time they have available.
- MPPs and candidates get a lot of meeting requests. You should expect to **follow-up on your invitation** after a few days if you haven't received any acknowledgement or a confirmed a date for the meeting.
- Once the meeting is scheduled, remember to **share the 2025 OLA & FOPL Pre-Budget Submission and the names/titles of those participating in the meeting with the MPP's or candidate's office**. This will help them prepare the MPP in advance and contribute to a better dialogue.
- Review the resources provided in this toolkit in advance of your meeting.
- If more than one person is joining the call from your team, determine speaking roles in advance.
- It is important to prepare a local example as stories strengthen your message.

**Step 2: Conducting a meeting**

- Focus on the key messages and “asks” and highlight the local examples in combination with the key messages from the briefing note.
- Be passionate and respectful.
- Be concise as you may only have 15- or 20-minutes total, and it is important to leave time for questions.
- Take notes using the meeting tracker – enclosed in this toolkit is a template meeting tracker chart.



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**Step 3: Following up after the meeting**

- Connect with OLA and FOPL through Lily Kwok ([lkwok@accessola.com](mailto:lkwok@accessola.com)) to let her know how the meeting(s) with your local MPP or candidate went. Also use this time to raise questions and information requests, particularly if the MPP or candidate is interested in learning more about the wage enhancement issue.
- Send a “thank you” email to the MPP or candidate.
- Send briefing materials (the [2025 OLA & FOPL Pre-Budget Submission](#)), as promised, in follow-up email.

**Making the Most of Informal Meetings and Encounters**

Although informal meeting opportunities are less likely to occur, you may have opportunities to connect with your local MPPs or candidates through less formal means. If you run into a candidate at your library, or a local event, be sure to take the opportunity to engage and educate them safely on the role libraries are playing in your community.

These informal meetings are invaluable for fostering a positive, personal relationship with an individual who may become your next MPP – and a champion for libraries at Queen’s Park.

Be sure to get their contact information and follow up afterwards to share [OLA & FOPL’s Ontario Pre-Budget Submission](#). Make sure they know you’re always available to answer questions!

**2. Write or Email a Letter / Questionnaire to Local Candidates**

If you can’t meet directly with a local candidate, you also have the option of sending a letter directly to them, outlining our key messages for the Ontario Election.

The most effective letters to candidates include a survey or question for the candidate to answer. These allow you to get a better sense of where the candidate stands on issues important to libraries and will be very useful should the candidate be successfully elected.

Email is often easiest, but most candidates will have a physical office open during the campaign period where a letter can be dropped off or mailed.

**If you are planning to reach out to your local candidate or MPP by email / letter, please contact us at [lkwok@accessola.com](mailto:lkwok@accessola.com) for a template letter.**

### 3. Engage Through Social Media

Whether you meet with your candidates directly or not, you can help raise the profile of Ontario's libraries this election by taking the conversation online. An Instagram, LinkedIn or Facebook post can be used to share the impact of libraries in your community, to demonstrate your support for libraries, or raise awareness of the issues confronting the sector.

- Use OLA/FOPL's key messages to inspire your social media posts.
- Be sure to tag your local candidates and share local examples.
- Don't forget to use the hashtags **#ILoveONLibraries**, **#LibrariesForLife** and **#ONPoli**. It helps make sure that local candidates will see your posts and encourages them to show their support!

**QUICK TIP! *Think before you post!* If you're not sure about something you want to post, don't hesitate to ask OLA/FOPL for feedback.**

#### Sample Social Media Posts

- Had a great conversation today with [insert social media handle of Candidate] about the importance of Ontario's libraries. #ILoveONLibraries #LibrariesForLife #ONPoli
- [tag candidates] Every year, there are 135 million visits to Ontario public libraries! Keep libraries sustainable by enhancing provincial operating funding for libraries. #ONPoli #ILoveONLibraries #LibrariesForLife
- An Ontario Digital Public Library would provide access high-quality digital resources to all Ontarians [tag candidates] #ONPoli #ILoveONLibraries #LibrariesForLife
- Virtually and in-person, public libraries are providing access to important digital and in-person resources, mental health and well-being supports. Keep libraries sustainable by enhancing provincial operating funding for libraries. #ONPoli #ILoveONLibraries #LibrariesForLife
- School libraries are a critical part of helping students succeed and achieving Ontario's curriculum objectives for literacy, research and other critical skills. Keep them funded and viable! #ONPoli #ILoveSchoolLibraries #LibrariesForLife
- School libraries are at the heart of student literacy achievement. Restore protected funding for Ontario's school libraries. #ONPoli #ILoveSchoolLibraries #LibrariesForLife

#### **4. Ask key questions at town hall meetings and all-candidates debates**

During the election, candidates will participate in several community events where members of the public may have the opportunity to ask questions. You may also have a chance encounter with a candidate or be speaking with them at an event you've organized.

These interactions, which may be in-person or virtual, are great opportunities for you and library supporters to educate and find out where candidates stand on the issues important to school, public and First Nations libraries and library staff.

We have provided four questions for your consideration and use. These reflect the issues identified in OLA and FOPL's Ontario Libraries Election Brief.

1. The pandemic demonstrated how critical access to online resources through public and school libraries is for individuals, students and families across Ontario. But these resources are expensive. Ontario can follow the proven lead of other provinces like Alberta and Saskatchewan by investing in the creation of an Ontario Digital Public Library. We can leverage the province's purchasing power to cost-effectively provide every public library in Ontario, no matter how small, with a common set of high-quality online resources, accessible to everyone.

***Will you support greater access to digital library resources across Ontario through the creation of Ontario's Digital Public Library, and committing to the critical investment needed to make this a reality?***

2. Public libraries are critical to communities across Ontario and essential to thriving local economies and economic growth. They are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource. Millions of Ontarians rely on local public libraries in their communities: to work, to learn, to connect to community and government services, and to find or train for a job.

But provincial base funding for public libraries has been frozen for over 25 years, and our public library budgets are reaching a tipping point. Additional provincial investment is vital for ensuring that our libraries – in rural communities, small towns and cities alike – are sustainably funded.

***Do you support enhancing critically important provincial funding for public libraries, and ensuring that the support reaches those libraries where it is most needed?***

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3. First Nations public libraries perform a unique role in the preservation of their communities' memory, archiving community photos and historical information, and in revitalizing languages. In recognition of this, the Ontario Government committed to investing \$1.25 million annually into First Nations public libraries as part of the 2024 Ontario Budget. This critical investment is a vital first step to restoring stability to libraries on-reserve. A sustainable funding and operating model must be developed to preserve long-term viability of these important local hubs.

***Will you commit to building upon the enhanced funding commitment in the 2024 Ontario Budget by working alongside First Nations public library leaders to design and implement a sustainable funding model for public libraries on reserve?***

4. School libraries are at the heart of student literacy achievement. Literacy and critical research skills are foundational to student success in STEM and other key subject areas. Yet, despite the importance of school libraries to achieving Ontario's literacy objectives, student access to school libraries has significantly declined over the past 20 years. Ontario's Core Education Funding Model, introduced last spring, is putting school libraries at further immediate risk. It has eliminated protected funding for school libraries and library staff. School boards are also no longer required to report on how or if they are funding school libraries.

***Will you support updating Ontario's Core Education Funding Model to ensure that school library funding is protected and that school boards are held accountable for how they invest these funds through regular reporting to the Ministry of Education?***

## **ABOUT US**

This document was produced by the Ontario Library Association (OLA) and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL).

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) is the oldest continually operating non-profit library association in Canada, with over 3,500 members comprised of library staff and supporters from public, school, academic, and special libraries.

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) represents 237 public library systems in Ontario, including 39 First Nations public libraries, in communities throughout the Province.

Together, OLA and FOPL are committed to ensuring that libraries are able to continue to play a critical role in the social, education, cultural and economic success of our communities and schools.

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## **APPENDIX A: RESOURCES**

- [OLA and FOPL's joint 2025 Budget Submission: Supporting Ontario's Public & School Libraries to Empower Local Communities](#)
  
- [OLA and FOPL's Elections Toolkit Homepage](#)
  
- [OLA Save Our School Libraries Campaign Homepage](#)

## **APPENDIX B: KEY MESSAGES**

### **Public Libraries**

- Public libraries are critical to communities across Ontario and essential to thriving local economies and economic growth.
- Public libraries are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource. They are engines of innovation, entrepreneurship, and local economic development in communities of all sizes.
- Millions of Ontarians rely on local public libraries in their communities: to work, to learn, to connect to community and government services, and to find or train for a job.
- Despite this, many individuals and families across the province are unable to access the local public library resources they need.
- In urban centres, rural and Northern communities alike, public library budgets are overstretched – and the situation is getting worse.
- The combined impact of the pandemic, the pressure of inflation on public library and municipal budgets and growing social and economic challenges in communities across the province have brought public libraries to a critical point.
- The situation for public libraries on Ontario First Nation Reserves is even more challenging. The municipal tax revenue used to support most public libraries does not exist for public libraries in First Nation communities.
- Investing in public libraries will directly support communities and local economies.
- The Ontario Government can make sure that all Ontarians – no matter where they live or learn – will continue to have access to much-needed modern, cost-effective resources and services through their local public libraries.
- As the voice of Ontario's libraries, OLA and FOPL are strongly recommending three targeted investments to ensure that public libraries are sustainable and can continue to meet the important needs of their communities.
- Provide critical e-learning support and fair access to modern, digital resources for all Ontario public libraries through the creation of an Ontario Digital Public Library, leveraging the province's significant purchasing power to give all Ontarians access to a

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universal set of high- quality e-learning & online resources through their local public library.

- Increase provincial operating funding for Ontario's public libraries to address critical shared priorities and community needs.
- Building upon the enhanced funding committed in the 2024 Ontario Budget, develop a sustainable funding model for public libraries on reserve to ensure that these important local hubs are fully funded and viable.

**School Libraries**

- Access to school libraries is a proven part of student success, especially in literacy.
- School libraries are at the heart of student literacy achievement. Literacy and critical research skills are foundational to student success in STEM and other key subject areas.
- Despite the importance of school libraries and library staff to achieving Ontario's literacy objectives, student access to school libraries has significantly declined over the past 20 years.
- Ontario's Core Education Funding Model, introduced last spring, is putting school libraries at further immediate risk by eliminating protected funding and accountability measures.
- OLA and FOPL are strongly recommending three priorities to ensure the long-term stability of school libraries.
- Update the Core Education Funding Model to create a defined sub-allocation for all school libraries and staffing funding, consistent with the provincial per-student formula.
- Update the Funding Model to fully protect these allocations.
- Restore the annual reporting and accountability requirements regarding school libraries for school boards and implement recommended enhancements previously submitted by the OSLA.



## **APPENDIX C: HOW DOES THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IMPACT ONTARIO'S LIBRARIES?**

### **School Libraries:**

#### **Municipal Jurisdiction: School Trustees (elected)**

#### **Provincial Jurisdiction: Ministry of Education**

The Ontario Ministry of Education administers the system of publicly funded elementary and secondary school education.

School boards receive money in two ways. First, some of the property taxes collected in your community go to your local school board. Second, the province tops up this amount to bring the total for each board up to the amount set out by the provincial funding formula. This funding is provided each year through the Core Education Funding. The provincial funding formula considers the many factors that make each school board unique. Funding for individual schools is the responsibility of the school boards. Occasionally there are increases to the funding formula for certain initiatives. Currently, the Ministry funding formula suggests 1 Elementary Teacher-Librarian per 763 Elementary pupils and 1 Teacher-Librarian per 909 Secondary pupils. However, not all school boards allocate the recommended funding to support their school libraries, as the current funding formula provides school boards with significant flexibility to choose how to spend these funds.

### **Public Libraries:**

#### **Municipal: Public Library Trustees (appointed and includes some municipal councillors who are elected)**

#### **Provincial: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming**

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming administers the Public Libraries Act and statutory grants under the Act and develops provincial policies for public libraries. Municipal councils are responsible for appointing public library boards and they provide most of the funding for libraries (municipal tax dollars). A funding formula consists of a mix of provincial and municipal funding based on population sizes. The provincial allocation of funds was not changed for more than 25 years.

## **First Nations Public Libraries:**

**Band Councils: Usually in-kind**

**Provincial: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming**

**Federal: Education funds**

The traditional source of tax revenue for non-native public libraries does not exist for public libraries in First Nations communities. Instead, provincial funding for these libraries is administered by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming through the Public Library Operating Grant (PLOG) and the First Nation Salary Supplement Grant (FNSS).

Federal funding for these libraries is taken from funds that are allocated for on-reserve education. Funding levels for on-reserve education are more than 30% lower than off-reserve, leaving little left to establish new libraries.

Band Councils are therefore tasked with providing essential support such as rent, hydro, internet, fax and telephone service.

As part of the 2024 Ontario Budget, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming committed to increasing funding for First Nations Public Libraries at \$1.25 million annually.

## **Academic Libraries:**

**Provincial: Ministry of Colleges and Universities**

The Minister of Education and the Minister of Colleges and Universities are responsible for the administration of laws relating to education and skills training. The Ministry is responsible for distributing funds allocated by the provincial legislature to colleges and universities. Colleges and Universities are also fee-based. The funding of academic libraries is at the discretion of the academic institution.

## **APPENDIX D: TEMPLATES**

These are sample letters that you can send to your local candidates – just remember to remove all italicized placeholders and replace them with the appropriate information!

### **Template – Candidate Meeting Request Email**

Subject: Meeting Request – [local library name]

Dear [name of Candidate or staff person],

On behalf of the Ontario Library Association (OLA) and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL), and in my capacity as [role] of the [local library name], I would like to request a meeting to update you on issues and opportunities impacting public and school libraries here in [COMMUNITY].

Libraries are critical to communities across Ontario and essential to thriving local economies and economic growth. They are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource. Millions of Ontarians rely on local libraries in their communities: to work, to learn, to connect to community and government services, and to find or train for a job. Despite this, many individuals and families across the province are unable to access the library resources they need.

This meeting is an opportunity to discuss the importance of libraries in empowering local communities of all sizes, the need for a modern, sustainable funding approach for libraries that reflects the needs of an innovative and integrated library system in Ontario, and how your support will help make this happen.

OLA is the oldest continually-operating non-profit library association in Canada, with over 3,500 members comprised of library staff and supporters from public, school, academic, and special libraries. FOPL represents 237 public library systems in Ontario, including 39 First Nations public libraries, in communities throughout the Province. Together, OLA and FOPL are committed to ensuring that libraries are able to continue to play a critical role in the social, education, cultural and economic success of our communities and schools.

Please feel free to contact me to coordinate or if you have any questions: [email] or

[phone]. Thank you,

[name and role]

## **Template – Direct Email/Letter to Candidate with Survey on Library Issues**

If you can't meet directly with a local candidate, you also have the option of sending a letter directly to them, outlining our key messages for the Ontario Election.

The most effective letters to candidates include a survey or question for the candidate to answer. These allow you to get a better sense of where the candidate stands on issues important to libraries and will be very useful should the candidate be successfully elected.

Email is often easiest, but most candidates will have a physical office open during the campaign period where a letter can be dropped off or mailed.

**If you are a public library leader planning to reach out to your local candidate or MPP by email / letter, please contact us at [lkwok@accessola.com](mailto:lkwok@accessola.com) for a template letter.**

## Template – Candidate Meeting Worksheet

Use this worksheet to take notes that will help you prepare for your meeting and ensure that your information is stored in one place. After your meeting, please share your meeting notes with OLA/FOPL. You have the option of submitting this by email to Lily Kwok (lkwok@accessola.com).

Name of Meeting Target:	
Riding:	
Party:	
Supporting staff:	
Meeting Attendees from OLA / FOPL:	
Summary of Meeting Discussion:	
Meeting Tone (Positive/ Negative; Supportive/Not Supportive)	
Questions from Meeting Target / Staff:	
Commitments made by Meeting Target / Staff	