

First Nations Public Libraries in Ontario

- First Nations communities require public libraries just as much as any other community.
- Public libraries often serve as an **accessible gathering place** and **information sharing resource** for many First Nations communities, where they exist.
- There is broad recognition and support for the concept of continuing education at the community level as well as **increased accessibility to all educational outlets**, including public libraries.
- There are **133 First Nations communities** in Ontario. Of these, only **37 have public libraries**.

Funding Ontario's First Nations Public Libraries

- The traditional source of tax revenue for non-native public libraries does not exist for public libraries in First Nations communities.
- 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). These funds provide on average **\$15,000/year** to each of these existing libraries.
- However, in 2024, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Gaming invested an **additional \$1.25 million annually** in First Nations public libraries.
- 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.

Challenges Faced by Ontario's First Nations Public Libraries

First Nations public libraries are either governed by their Band primarily in the culture, recreation, or education departments.* The location of the library in the school system can make it difficult to establish a public library identity in the community.

- A significant number of First Nations people **do not own or have access to a computer and the internet**. Many **cannot afford to buy books** for themselves and their families.
- Only 26% of First Nations students on reserve graduate on time, and just 44% graduate within five years, compared with nearly 89% of Ontario students overall.
- The Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Right to Read* inquiry found that Indigenous students consistently perform below provincial averages in reading assessments, reflecting systemic barriers that continue to limit equitable educational outcomes.

*Six Nations Public Library is a FNPL but is governed by a separate Library Board according to the requirement of Boards under the Public Library Act.

