

InsideOLBA

MESSAGE FROM YOUR EDITOR

Greetings, everyone, from Eastern Ontario! I hope that this message finds all of you well, and enjoying the fall weather. And, of course, welcome to the Fall 2025 edition of your *InsideOLBA*. As I often say, this is *your* publication, and I hope that you enjoy and benefit from this edition, and that it inspires you to contribute an article to the next one (I am always on the lookout for writers!).

What's in the Fall *InsideOLBA*? First, we have a message from your President, Nathan Etherington, in which he provides some valuable insights into the world of library boards, and of the world in which we find ourselves.

We also have interesting articles on the evolution of public library boards, the recent ONLibChat on library board governance, a message regarding the bursary that is available to first-time Super Conference attendees, and a wonderful message from Adrian Graham (Chair, Springwater Township Public Library Board) on being the recipient of the James Bain Medallion.

A busy fall, and an equally busy *InsideOLBA*. I hope that you enjoy it, and please feel free to contact me with story ideas, comments, suggestions, etc.

Happy reading!
Kerry Badgley
North Grenville Public Library Board

MESSAGE FROM YOUR 2025 OLBA PRESIDENT

Welcome to your Fall edition of *InsideOLBA* that I hope you will find full of interesting and relevant information to help support your role as Library Board Trustees. The summer months often provide us with an opportunity to relax, recharge, and reflect on our accomplishments over the past year and allow us to return with renewed vigor to our work as Board Members.

OLBA Council has worked hard and collaboratively to help bring an edition that I hope you will find has additional content to support your work as a Library Board. There is an article about the 7 tenets from the original Public Libraries Act, building off the work of Dr. Lorne Bruce. I would encourage you to use this as a basis for discussion in your Library Board meetings, particularly if you have a section on your agenda for Board Development.

There is also timely information about some preliminary information for Library Board Trustee Bootcamp at the OLA Super Conference on Saturday, January 31, 2026. We've included a high level summary of the planned sessions, bursaries available for first time attendees, and last year's winner of the James Bain Medallion Award. You can start planning now for nominations for this year's award and planning your library's budget to allow trustees to attend.

OLA has also embarked on a new engagement model that will allow Library Board Trustees to learn more about issues facing the sector through OLA's new five [Communities of Practice](#). This gives you the opportunity to connect with the library ecosystem without having to make a 3-year commitment to sitting on the OLBA Council. I would encourage you to explore this opportunity and what you can learn from the OLA Communities.

This is also a reminder to ensure your Board's OLA membership is renewed for the coming year! Your OLA membership gives your board special rates to OLA events, like the Bootcamp and gives you access to our ONLibChats. These informal chats are excellent ways to remain connected to the community of library boards, and to learn more about issues affecting boards in the province.

You can always email me at contactme@nathaneitherington.ca to make OLBA aware of issues facing your library board.

Wishing you and your Library Board a productive fall session,
Nathan Etherington
2025 OLBA President



NEWS

OLBA Super Conference Bursary

The OLA helps support board member development by providing bursaries to first-time attendees to OLA Super Conference and Board Member Boot Camp which will take place on Saturday, January 31 at the Metro Convention Centre in downtown Toronto. There are a total of two bursaries, \$1,250 each, available for northern communities and one bursary of \$500 for a Southern Ontario library trustee who represents a community of 15,000 or less.

To apply:

- Your Board must have an OLA membership
- The person applying has never been to Super Conference before

- The person must state which bursary they are applying for and ensure that they are applying for the correct geographic area.

[Applications](#) are due by December 15. Here is what a recipient said about their Boot Camp experience last year:

"As a first-time councillor and Library board member, it was a true joy to earn the travel bursary for Super Conference 2025. I learned so much about library capabilities, nerded out with library folk across the country and didn't spend a dollar of my own library's budget! I'm so grateful for this bursary as I would never have been able to attend otherwise—totally worth it!"

- Catherine Kiewing, Dryden Public Library Trustee

James Bain Medallion

By guest contributor Adrian Graham

I was deeply honoured and humbled when I learned that I had been named the recipient of the James Bain Medallion. Bestowed annually by the Ontario Public Library Association, this prestigious award honours a library board member who has shown exceptional leadership, advocacy, and dedication in advancing the role of libraries in their community.

For me, as board chair of the Springwater Township Public Library, receiving the Bain Medallion reflected more than personal recognition—it validated our entire board's strategic vision, advocacy, and stewardship of the library. The award acknowledges the board's success in fostering a respectful relationship with our municipal council and our close work with our library CEO, community members, and volunteers. The award also celebrates the board's ability to oversee effective policy-making that ensures library services remain inclusive, vibrant, and well-governed.

Named after James Bain, Ontario Library Association's first president (1901) and Toronto's inaugural chief librarian, the medal carries deep historical resonance. Bain championed public access to knowledge and shaped Ontario's early library framework. Thus, a modern-day library board member who earns this honour is seen as continuing Bain's legacy: promoting literacy, equal access, innovation, and cultural enrichment in their community.

As board chair, receiving the James Bain Medallion signaled that my contributions have gone beyond routine governance. It acknowledges my belief in ensuring strong public accountability, supporting equitable access to information, and championing the library as a cornerstone of civic life. Under my leadership, the board adopted a new strategic plan and financial control was transferred to the board. We have worked at educating the community about the Public Libraries Act, growing the Friends of the Library group, negotiating the library's first collective agreement with its newly unionized employees, and reviewing the results of a community survey. The award also validates the countless hours of volunteer service and decision-making from our board that directly affects the sustainability and growth of library services. In addition, the award affirms the strong working relationship our board has with Jodie Player Delgado, our library CEO. Her willingness to authentically collaborate with the board and to value the individual expertise of board members has been invaluable.

Brad Thompson, the Township of Springwater councillor who sits on the library board, commented that, "On a broad level, this recognition of Adrian's efforts strengthens the reputation of the library board and the library itself within the community. It enhances public trust, inspires future library board members, and affirms the value of library governance as a vital form of public service; it also reflects positively on both the library and our municipality. This type of acclaim increases the municipality's profile in Ontario's library sector and among local residents, which in turn fosters civic pride and public trust."

I was genuinely surprised at being nominated for, and winning, the James Bain Medallion. Having now had some time to reflect on the achievement and to hear from my community, I appreciate the importance of this type of provincial recognition and I understand how vital it is to motivate present and future library board members to help ensure excellent governance of a vibrant library system moving forward.

Please consider submitting a nominee for the 2025 OLA Awards to celebrate your library boards' success over the past year.

ONLibChat About Governance

By Nathan Etherington

OLBA led an ONLibChat about library governance with interested board members. We had a decent response with about a dozen attendees from library boards and OLBA. In addition, help was provided by OLA Staff including Dr. Sabrina Saunders who was able to share insights from her time as CEO of Blue Mountains Public Library.

We started out sharing the results of the survey conducted by OLBA in June that asked respondents to rank the most pressing issues for their library board. Budget was the top response and many attendees of the ONLibChat highlighted budgets and as one of their concerns.

Questions were asked about how the budget is reported to board members and how it works with your municipality. As outlined in the *Public Libraries Act*, the Board is responsible for appointing a treasurer. In many cases, the CEO of your library is appointed to be the treasurer. The Board should receive updates at each meeting about the state of the finances and its relation to your approved budget. Depending on your municipality, the finances may be done by your municipal finance staff and provided to your CEO.

If you have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with your municipality, this may have additional clarity around which services the municipality provides to the Library Board, often free of charge and included finance. The MOU for Blue Mountains Public Library states that the library received 6% of the tax levy, which was determined by the municipality and the Library Board to support a healthy library.

Another topic of conversation was around library reserves and what types (Capital, Operating, etc.) are established. The Ontario Library Service published a Finance Control/Oversight Policy in 2023 and notes that the *Public Libraries Act* is silent in this regard. Many libraries have a capital reserves fund that can be used for building a new branch or funding a study needed for capital improvements. Libraries may also have an operating reserve in which surpluses are deposited for cash flow interruptions and unanticipated expenditures. **Markham** Public Library has an [Operating Reserve Policy](#).

Advocacy is a broad term defined as public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy, in our case as Library Board Trustees - the Library. Attendees discussed a variety of advocacy tools from provincial asks through Queen's Park Days run by OLA and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) to individual actions. One attendee described an event for Public Libraries Week in which they invited their MPP and opened their eyes to the work of libraries. They left with a better understanding of what libraries do and took that information to Queen's Park. Other attendees described improving relationships with the municipality and having meetings with individual elected officials to describe the importance of library funding.

Finally, we discussed Strong Mayor Powers and the impact that may have on the library. While most of these powers relate to the presentation of the municipal budget, they do not extend to the employment of the CEO. The *Public Libraries Act* states that the board "shall appoint a chief executive officer who shall have general supervision over and direction of the operations of the public library and its staff" in Section 15. While Strong Mayor Powers are relatively new and untested, we will have to see if these new powers come into conflict with the *Public Libraries Act*.

OLBA understands that not all Board Trustees can attend OLBA Bootcamp and it is hoped that more ONLibChats can be provided to OLBA Members to help support the work that Library Boards do around the province.

OLA Adopts Communities of Practice

By **Marj** Poirier

Earlier this fall, OLA adopted a new structure that will move the Association forward and encourage participation from its members. There is a lot of expertise and fantastic ideas right in our membership. This new model will give members a place to grow and connect with other people within OLA.

Think of the model like a modified dart board. At the centre will be OLA (Executive Director and staff). Following that small circle, there is a larger one, which is where OLA has organized the five library sectors-public, academic, health, school, and special. Councils will remain active in their sectors and will continue to play an essential role within these, just as they do now. You will notice that the Indigenous and Francophone councils have been moved to the larger circle. This last circle is the largest, because it encircles the entire circumference of the sectors, councils and OLA. It comprises the Communities of Practice, each of which is important everywhere, and that is why they are found in the largest ring.

OLA Communities of Practice

- Technology Community
- Francophone Community
- Indigenous Librarianship Community
- Inclusive Libraries Community
- Climate Action Community
- Public Library Research Community

So, what is a Community of Practice (CoP)? Some of you may be familiar with this, perhaps from work or from other boards you may be on. But for those of you who are new to this concept, it is characterized by a shared interest or domain (libraries), community (a group of people who engage in joint activities and discussions within their councils (OLBA), and practice (members can use their knowledge and expertise to become more active in the Association. It is a group of like-minded people from across different (or the same) sectors. The ultimate goal would be to have members come together around certain passions, ideas, and so on. This model will make it easier for people to collaborate, either online or in person. For example, if you have a passion for new technology that you think would be an asset within OLBA, and also academic libraries, this model will make it easier to get other members who perhaps haven't been involved in OLA/OLBA to get involved.

Communities of Practice connect people who might not otherwise interact. More importantly, they enable you to work at your own comfort level. How much you would want to contribute is entirely up to you. CoP's will encourage knowledge to become more transferable, and thus shared to improve our Association. OLA has just put our model onto their website, and I encourage you to look at it. We will be talking more about this at Boot Camp, but I wanted to share this exciting new model with you now.

If you have any questions or would like to become more involved, please reach out to one of the OLBA Council members. Better yet, if you are planning on attending Boot Camp, please come and seek one of us out. We look forward to hearing from you!

Central Tenets From the Original Public Libraries Act and Their Relevance

By Nathan Etherington

One of our fellow OLBA Councillors once said to me "We all know the work of Lorne Bruce and his work on library board governance." While I had read a journal article, it got me thinking about whether other library trustees knew of Lorne Bruce and his work. Being a governance geek, I love reading a dry journal article or piece of non-fiction more than picking up a fiction book (isn't it wonderful that we all have a diversity of reading preferences), but this may not be everyone's cup of tea.

In his paper, *Local Government and Library Boards in Ontario, 1882-1945*, Bruce gives a history of the introduction of the first piece of legislation in Ontario regarding Free Libraries in 1882 and was published almost 30 years ago. He points to 7 central tenets that are familiar to us today which made me reflect on whether they are still relevant in today's shifting and often volatile political landscape.

1. Because appointed boards are to some degree insulated from immediate political concerns, library trustees are freer to act in the long-term interests of the entire community and its general values.

I believe that this point is one that a municipal representative may not like to read, as it may go against their short-term political goals. The *Public Libraries Act* continues to require that the majority of positions on a library board are citizen appointees and this can create a conflict with our municipal councils. This tenet is still relevant and protects the library from political shenanigans and trustees do have a much more forward and long-term vision than a 4-year municipal election cycle.

2. Appointed boards are non-sectarian, so a better balance can be struck among religious groups in the community since one group does not have a preponderance of library appointments.

While this point mentions religious groups, non-sectarian also can refer to political groups, which does make the point valid. We often talk about succession planning for library boards and what skillsets we are missing at the board table. This allows a diverse set of candidates to be put forward to municipal councils so that we have people from a broad segment of the community and various ideologies.

3. Trustees can devote their full energy to a library to ensure its prominence and efficient operation, thus relieving aldermen [Councillors] of an added duty.

The role of a municipal councillor has become increasingly complex and councils should be more appreciative of the library board taking one of those complex pieces off a councillor's plate, allowing them to devote more time and energy to other municipal challenges and opportunities.

4. Voluntary public participation on boards is valuable because citizens should share, in a significant way, in the decision-making process and public policies of local government.

Citizens can volunteer their time on various local boards, including municipal heritage committees, cemeteries, tourism or maybe local business associations. I remember a Councillor telling me that he first started his life in public service by serving on the heritage committee. Getting involved in any of these public boards or committees allows one to gain valuable experience in the decision-making process of local government. I also know of several library board trustees who have gone on to become elected municipal officials.

5. Trustees, partly selected on the basis of knowledge and expertise, can provide better judgement and continuity in expanding library services to a community.

Library Boards are, generally, reflective of their communities diversity, religious as well as racial backgrounds, sex, and class. Having this variety ensures library boards are strong reflections of their community. Citizens have much more regular contact with their library than elected politicians and, as such, can contribute more of their expertise, easily identify opportunities to expand library service, and provide continuity to the library board.

6. Public accountability is ensured by means of legislative provisions regarding the elected appointing bodies that ultimately control the selection process and financing of services.

This tenet is one that trustees may not like to hear and as our Mayor expressed to me, "Library Board Trustees serve at the pleasure of Council". At the same time, I have heard from various elected officials that there is no accountability for library board trustees, which is enough to get one's blood boiling. As Bruce points out, the appointment process is the public accountability mechanism. Trustees may not have to run for office, like municipal councillors do, but the appointment process is the accountability mechanism. It may not look the same as it does for councillors, but accountability is embedded within the *Public Libraries Act*.

7. Appointments to library boards allow more flexibility for representing the varied community characteristics than the electoral process permits.

In studying for my education degree, I took a course called Teaching for Equity and Social Justice, which outlined that our political systems are representative of hegemony (i.e. white, straight, male, upper class, etc). As such, elected officials are not truly representative of their community make up. This is where the library is able to succeed in being more representative of a community than a municipal council can be.

Of the two municipalities in my area composed of 22 municipal officials, only 4 are women and only 1 municipality has had a female mayor as head of Council for a single term in my lifetime. Of the 7 citizen appointees on my library board, 5 are female.

From Carnegie to TikTok: The Evolution of Library Boards and the Call for New Voices

By Charmaine McCraw

If you've ever strolled through your local library and felt the hum of ideas, community, and quiet purpose — there's a group of people behind that magic. No,

not just the librarians (though they're heroes in their own right). We're talking about library boards: the often-unsung champions guiding strategy, budgets, and big-picture community impact.

In an age of streaming wars, social media rabbit holes, and AI everything, library boards are undergoing a renaissance. They're moving from dusty rooms of policy binders to dynamic tables where innovation, inclusion, and TikTok meet traditional stewardship.

So, what is a library board, and why might you be the next great trustee? Let's dive into the evolution of public library boards and why now is the perfect time to get involved.

A Brief (and Surprisingly Dramatic) History

Public libraries have always been more than shelves and silence. They're social infrastructure — places where democracy, literacy, and lifelong learning meet. But their governance roots stretch back to the 19th century, when philanthropist Andrew Carnegie offered to fund libraries on one condition: communities had to commit to maintaining them.

That's where library boards came in, involving groups of volunteers tasked with ensuring that libraries remained publicly accountable, financially stable, and responsive to the needs of their citizens.

In the early days, boards were often composed of local elites — businessmen, clergymen, and educators — who viewed libraries as moral and educational institutions. They focused on "improving" the public, often deciding which books were "appropriate" for readers (spoiler: romance novels and radical ideas didn't make the cut).

Fast-forward to the 20th century, and public library boards began to reflect broader social values. As education expanded and women entered public life in larger numbers, the composition of boards diversified. Libraries became cultural hubs, and boards began tackling questions of access, equity, and modernization.

The Modern Library Board: Mission Meets Momentum

Today, library boards are less about gatekeeping and more about bridge-building. They connect the library's vision to the evolving needs of the community.

1. Strategic Governance

Modern boards don't micromanage, they steer. Trustees set direction through strategic plans, budgets, and policies that support the library's mission. They ensure libraries can evolve from quiet reading spaces into multi-purpose community centers — with everything from maker labs to mental-health workshops.

2. Advocacy and Funding

In a world of tightening budgets, library trustees are storytellers and advocates. They champion the library at city council meetings, community events, and even online. They help secure grants, donations, and partnerships that keep programs alive, whether that's a literacy camp for kids or digital access for seniors.

3. Inclusion and Representation

Public libraries serve everyone, and that means boards need to reflect everyone. Modern recruitment emphasizes diversity in age, culture, lived experience, and skill set. A great board might include a retired teacher, a local entrepreneur, a newcomer advocate, a tech specialist, and a teenager passionate about climate change — all learning from each other.

4. Innovation and Relevance

From e-books to VR learning, libraries are constantly adapting. Boards help librarians test new ideas such as lending telescopes, hosting Indigenous storytelling circles, or offering podcast studios. A forward-thinking trustee asks not, "What did we do last year?" but "What could we do next?"

The Big Shift: From Custodians to Changemakers

If early library boards were custodians of books, today's boards are architects of community learning ecosystems. This evolution has been driven by three major forces:

1. Technology

The digital revolution redefined what a library offers. Library boards have had to navigate e-book licensing, public Wi-Fi, online databases, and even digital privacy issues. Many libraries now lend laptops and hotspots, bridging the digital divide for people who can't afford home internet. Trustees help shape these access policies and ensure digital equity remains a public right.

2. Community Expectations

Modern patrons want more than books — they want belonging. Libraries host climate cafés, coding clubs, local art exhibits, and newcomer welcome sessions. Boards increasingly think like community strategists, asking, "How do we make this library indispensable to daily life?"

3. Social Responsibility

From Truth and Reconciliation to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work, library boards are re-examining their roles in social change. Many have adopted Reconciliation Action Plans, anti-racism policies, and Indigenous engagement strategies — recognizing that libraries sit at the intersection of education and justice.

Why You (Yes, You) Should Consider Joining a Library Board

Being a library trustee isn't just about loving books (though that helps). It's about shaping a future where knowledge is accessible to all, regardless of income, background, or device.

Here's what you can expect, and what you'll gain.

You'll Shape the Future of Learning

You'll help decide how libraries respond to new trends: artificial intelligence, virtual reality, misinformation, and digital literacy. You'll influence what resources and services are prioritized for your community.

You'll Build Leadership and Networks

Library boards are full of connectors — educators, city planners, entrepreneurs, and creatives. Serving as a trustee hones your governance skills, expands your professional network, and gives you boardroom experience that's transferable to any sector.

You'll Strengthen Democracy

Public libraries are one of the few places where everyone belongs, no purchase required. Trustees defend that principle by ensuring transparency, accountability, and equitable access to information. In an era of polarization and paywalls, that's revolutionary work.

You'll Bring Fresh Perspective

Boards need voices from all walks of life, especially younger members, newcomers, and people with lived experience in digital culture or social innovation. If you've ever said, "The library should..." you're exactly the kind of person a board needs.

The Recruitment Revolution

Recruiting library trustees today is about storytelling and invitation, not obligation. Gone are the days when a few insiders quietly filled vacancies. Modern recruitment campaigns are creative, values-driven, and community-focused.

Many libraries now use social media storytelling, video testimonials, and community spotlights to showcase what being a trustee actually means. Others host "Meet the Board" cafés or pop-up info booths inside the library to demystify governance.

Successful campaigns make it clear: you don't need a master's degree or decades of experience, just curiosity, commitment, and care for your community.

The Future of Library Boards: Bold, Brave, and Belonging

The next era of library boards will be defined by adaptability and authenticity. We'll see boards experimenting with hybrid meetings, youth advisory partnerships, and even co-designing programs alongside community members.

Imagine:

- A board retreat held in a virtual reality library space.
- A trustee who uses TikTok to explain library policies.
- An Indigenous knowledge-keeper co-chairing the governance committee.
- Trustees collaborating with local creators to make the library a cultural production hub.

This isn't far-fetched — it's already happening in forward-thinking libraries across Canada.

Your Chapter Awaits

Public libraries have survived wars, recessions, pandemics, and technological upheavals because they adapt, and they adapt through the people who lead them.

If you've ever found comfort in the stacks, inspiration in a workshop, or connection in a library event, it might be time to give back. Library board recruitment isn't just about filling seats. It's about inviting dreamers, doers, and disruptors to write the next chapter.

Your library's story is still being written. And the next trustee — the next voice shaping how your community learns, grows, and connects — could be you.



Meet *InsideOLBA* Contributor and OLBA Board Member Charmaine McCraw

Charmaine McCraw is a strategist in reconciliation, workforce development, and team empowerment, with a deep passion for community learning and accessible education. As Chief Operating Officer at ORIGIN, she leads initiatives that connect technology, storytelling, and land-based knowledge to create meaningful pathways for learners of all ages.

Charmaine joined the Ontario Library Board to help shape the future of public libraries as inclusive spaces for connection, innovation, and lifelong learning. Representing Northern Ontario, she is committed to ensuring that the diverse voices, challenges, and strengths of northern and remote communities are reflected in provincial library planning. She believes libraries are vital community hubs—places where curiosity, culture, and belonging come together—and is dedicated to supporting their evolution in ways that honour both traditional knowledge and digital transformation.

If you would like to contribute an article for an upcoming edition of *InsideOLBA*, please send your article to Editor Kerry Badgley by emailing to unitedfarmersofontario@hotmail.com.



Ontario Library Association (OLA), Centre for Social Innovation, 192 Spadina Avenue,
Suite 300, Toronto ON, M5T 2C2

info@accessola.com | 1.877.340.1730 | accessola.com

Ontario Library Association, c/o Centre for Social Innovation, 192 Spadina Ave, Suite 300, Toronto,
Ontario M5T 2C2, Canada

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