REPORT TO THE LIBRARY BOARD
MEETING DATE: Wednesday, November 19, 2008

Session: Public Session
Subject: Federation of Ontario Public Libraries - Advocacy
Prepared By: Susanna Hubbard Krimmer
Presented By: Susanna Hubbard Krimmer
Purpose of Report: For Decision:
Information and Receipt

Recommendation:
It is recommended that the Library Board receive this report.

ISSUE / OPPORTUNITY

London Public Library is a member of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. The Federation's strategic focus includes advocacy, research and development, marketing, and consortia purchasing.

The advocacy and marketing roles, described on the FOPL website, are defined as:

As ONE VOICE, the Federation ensures issues facing public libraries are presented in a consistent manner benefiting all public libraries across Ontario. The Federation provides various levels of government with a view of public libraries as a united, relevant and integral component for economic and community development worthy of strong and continued support.

To market and promote the services provided by public libraries in Ontario, to highlight the economic and social value public libraries contribute to the development of our communities, and to strengthen the support of funding bodies and the community at large.

On October 30, 2008, FOPL issued a media release and letter to the provincial government in response to the economic statement made the previous week by Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan. In his correspondence to library CEOs across the province, FOPL CEO David Allen stated: “Our message is that public libraries become more important to their communities in uncertain economic times and the government should sustain funding for public libraries even in periods of financial restraint. The rationale is that public libraries provide information and services that are vital in a period of economic downturn and that use of these services will escalate dramatically.”

See: Appendix 1: Media Release and Appendix 2: Correspondence to Ministers.
NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Uncertain Economy Triggers Increased Public Library Use

Toronto, Ontario, October 30, 2008 – In response to Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan’s economic statement last week and his call for restraint in government spending during this period, the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries reports that utilization of public libraries escalates in uncertain economic times.

“In today’s context, the role for public libraries has become more relevant than ever,” said Marzio Apolloni, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Federation. “There is significant evidence to demonstrate that libraries experience an increase of use of up to 20% during an economic downturn. People know that no matter what is happening in the economy, they can get the information, services and assistance they need from the public library.”

As the public’s buying power shrinks, more people seek employment, complete their education or upgrade their skills. These people rely heavily on their public libraries for vital information on job opportunities, career planning and training, and small business management, and on services like literacy programs, computer skills development and supports for newcomers and students. “In response to lower household incomes, cash-strapped families and individuals will access the public library’s extensive collection of books, databases, DVD’s, magazines and newspapers, rather than buying and renting these same materials,” said Mr. Apolloni.

Computer usage is the area where increased demand is most dramatic. Because a significant number of Ontarians do not have access to computers at home, long waiting lists for in-house computers at Ontario public libraries are a daily occurrence. Public libraries provide access to a full range of licensed electronic resources and facilitate the government’s goal of closing the persistent digital divide amongst Ontarians.

Driven by layoffs and eroding retirement savings, many individuals are returning to the workforce and are coming to public libraries for career help. Often they need help with their computer skills because a lot of job searching these days takes place online. Rising numbers of employers are demanding online job applications. Many patrons are turning to public library computers to prepare resumes and cover letters, find work, apply for jobs online and open email accounts.

“Others enroll in public library literacy programs to build their reading, writing and numeracy skills as a means to improving their employment prospects,” said David Allen, the Federation’s Chief Executive Officer. “Public libraries provide high interest/low vocabulary resources, manuals for tutors, and space for tutoring.”
According to a recent report by Statistics Canada, “Immigrants are more sensitive to macro conditions than are Canadian-born, and their outcomes deteriorate disproportionately during recessions such as in the early 90s.” During these periods increasing numbers of newcomers turn to public libraries to gain proficiency in English through ESL collections and programs. Public libraries also provide access to Canadian accreditation information and other job-related materials, and promote volunteer opportunities to help newcomers gain Canadian experience and breakdown barriers to employment.

Public library utilization is also being driven by the growing needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs. With increasing frequency, these users are accessing the public library’s extensive reference materials and online databases to analyze market trends and investment opportunities. “These users are the segment of the business community that will lead Ontario’s economic recovery, so providing the necessary supports to them is critical,” said Mr. Allen.

“As the operating budgets of Ontario’s public libraries become tighter, our members are very concerned about their ability to accommodate growing numbers of patrons,” said Mr. Apolloni. During these uncertain economic times, the Federation stresses the importance to sustain public library services so that Ontarians have a place to go for the information and support they need.

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is a not-for-profit member organization that provides a single, strong voice for public libraries in Ontario to enhance library policies and programs through four strategic pillars: advocacy, marketing, research and consortia purchasing. The Federation’s Board of Directors includes both public library trustees and chief executives.

- 30 -

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October 29, 2008

Honourable Aileen Carroll
Minister of Culture and Minister Responsible for Seniors
900 Bay Street, 5th Floor, Mowat Block
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Honourable Dwight Duncan
Minister of Finance
7 Queen's Park Cres, 7th Flr, Frost Bldg South
Toronto ON M7A 1Y7

Dear Ministers Carroll and Duncan:

We at the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries acknowledge the uncertain economic times in which all Ontarians find themselves today. We read with interest the provincial economic statement last week and recognize the need for restraint when it comes to government spending during this period.

Our members are heartened by your government’s commitment to continue investments in priority programs and services while it takes steps to promote economic growth and job creation. In today’s context, the role for public libraries has become more relevant than ever. In this letter, we present justification for safeguarding government funding to Ontario’s public libraries even in a period of financial restraint.

It is critically important government be aware that the utilization of public libraries escalates in uncertain economic times. There is significant evidence to demonstrate that public libraries experience an increase of use of up to 20% during an economic downturn. People know that no matter what is happening in the economy, they can get the information, services and assistance they need from their public library.

As the public’s buying power shrinks, more people seek employment, complete their education or upgrade their skills. These people rely heavily on their public libraries for vital information on job opportunities, career planning and training, and small business management, and on services like literacy programs, computer skills development and supports for newcomers and students. In response to lower household incomes, cash-strapped families and individuals will access the public library’s extensive collection of books, databases, DVD’s, magazines and newspapers, rather than buying and renting these same materials.
Computer usage is the area where increased demand is most dramatic. Because a significant number of Ontarians do not have access to computers at home, long waiting lists for in-house computers at Ontario public libraries are a daily occurrence. Public libraries provide access to a full range of licensed electronic resources and facilitate the government’s goal of closing the persistent digital divide amongst Ontarians.

Driven by layoffs and eroding retirement savings, many individuals are returning to the workforce and are coming to public libraries for career help. Often they need help with their computer skills because a lot of job searching these days takes place online. Rising numbers of employers are demanding online job applications. Many patrons are turning to public library computers to prepare resumes and cover letters, find work, apply for jobs online and open email accounts. Others enroll in public library literacy programs to build their reading, writing and numeracy skills as a means to improving their employment prospects. Public libraries provide high interest/low vocabulary resources, manuals for tutors, and space for tutoring.

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Public library utilization is also being driven by the growing needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs. With increasing frequency, these users are accessing the public library’s extensive reference materials and online databases to analyze market trends and investment opportunities. These users are the segment of the business community that will lead Ontario’s economic recovery, so providing the necessary supports to them is critical.

The public library serves as a cornerstone to a vital community. In tough times citizens often feel isolated, face radical changes in lifestyle and need the support of others. Public libraries represent common gathering places where people can feel socially connected. Government’s continued support of public libraries is proof of its commitment to vital communities.

As the operating budgets of Ontario’s public libraries become tighter, our members are very concerned about their ability to accommodate growing numbers of patrons. During these uncertain economic times, it is important to sustain public library services so that Ontarians have a place to go for the information and support they need.

Representatives of the Federation welcome the opportunity to attend the budgetary consultation session in London on October 30, 2008 to provide input on how government’s strategies for restraint can be targeted appropriately. And Minister Carroll,
we look forward to our meeting with you on November 3, 2008 where the contents of this letter can be discussed in more depth.

Yours truly,

Marzio Apolloni
Chair, Board of Directors

About Us
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