

The Public Library Sector in Ontario

Public library service in Ontario is a municipal service operated with the legal framework of provincial legislation called the ***Public Libraries Act R.S.O 1990, chapter P.44*** (PLA). As a result, awareness of the provincial legislation and the role of the municipal government is important.

The Role of the Municipal/County Government

Under the PLA, public libraries in Ontario must be operated under the management and control of a local public library board. The PLA gives authority to the municipal or county council to establish a library with a board, or to enter into a service agreement with a neighbouring municipality for library service. The PLA then gives authority to the municipal or county council to appoint individuals to serve on that library board; with the renewal of the board every four years with the term of council.

Under the PLA, the library board must present estimates to the municipal or county council outlining all sums required by the board for the operation of the library during the year. The primary source of operating funds is often the municipal or county government, and so this estimates document is a significant part of a library board's work.

The municipal government is often the owner of the building in which the local library is housed. Depending on the facilities agreements in place, it could be the municipality which then takes responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the library building or it could be given over to the library board who are using that building.

The library board can use municipal services for specific functions. For example, the library board could enter into an agreement for municipal staff to provide IT services or assist with human resources functions such as staff training on workplace violence and harassment. A number of library boards in Ontario have asked the municipality to assist with board financial administration. Under the PLA, the library board must have its own bank account, and is responsible for public library operations and services but day-to-day financial administration could be delegated to municipal staff.

Types of public libraries

Four types of library boards are identified in the *Public Libraries Act, R.S.O. 1990, chapter P.44*:

Municipal Public Library - The *Act* grants a single municipality the power to establish, by by-law, a public library which shall be under the management and control of a board which is known as a corporation. This corporation is known as The *(insert name of municipality)* Public Library Board; for example, The Brockville Public Library Board. A municipal public library is under the management and control of a board of no fewer than five members, which are appointed by the municipal council. The council cannot appoint more of its own members to the board than members of the public.

Union Public Library - A union public library is established by the councils of two or more municipalities making an agreement. The agreement specifies what proportion of the cost of the establishment, operation and maintenance of the union public library will be paid by each municipality. The union public library is under the management and control of a union board. The board is comprised of no fewer than 5 members appointed by the councils of the affected municipalities and in the proportions and manner specified in the agreement. The councils cannot appoint more of their own members to the board than members of the public.

County Library - A county library is established where a resolution of the councils of at least two-thirds of the municipalities forming part of the county requests that the county establishes a county library system. The county council passes a by-law to establish a county library. The county library shall be under the management and control of a board. A county library board is composed of at least five members appointed by county council. The county council can appoint a bare majority of its own members to the board with a minority of members from the public. A county library is a corporation known in English as The *(insert name of county)* County Library Board; for example, The Essex County Library Board.

Please note that there are four counties/regions with library systems but which do not have a library board. These are historic arrangements based on private member legislation passed for most in the 1970s. These library systems are found in Lennox & Addington, Lambton, Elgin and Region of Waterloo.

A **county library co-operative** can no longer be established under the *Act*. Simcoe County Library Co-operative is the only co-operative in Ontario.

A note about First Nation libraries

About 40% of Ontario First Nation communities have established public libraries within their communities. With respect to First Nation libraries, the *Public Libraries Act* is permissive, rather than prescriptive, and the *Public Libraries Act* is often a 'best practice' resource. First Nation libraries are eligible for a 'per capita operating grant' and have access to the Ministry's [First Nations Public Library Development Program](#).

The Role of the Provincial Government

Provincial responsibility for public library service rests with the Programs and Services Branch within the Culture Division of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The Minister and his or her staff are responsible for the administration of the *Public Libraries Act* and for the development of provincial policies for the public library systems across Ontario.

The Ministry publishes reports on several library indicators through the [Ontario Public Library Statistics](#) programs. These statistics are compiled using self-reported data from the Annual Survey of Public Libraries which is completed by library staff in the spring of the year.

The Ministry provides direct support of local public library service through an annual, per household grant to the local library. In 1998, provincial base funding for public libraries was \$4.08 per household (urban rate), \$4.80 per household (smaller rural rate) and \$1.50 per capita (First Nations). The amount that a library receives is based on statistics provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for the number of households at that time. Since 1998, the provincial base funding formula has been flat-lined. To receive the grant, public libraries in the province are required to complete the annual survey for their library and the Application for Public Library Operating Grants (PLOG) and Pay Equity (PE) Grants, as well as provide specific financial details to the Ministry responsible for public libraries. From time to time, the Ministry also administers special purpose grants available to local public libraries, for example, the 2017-2018, ILDS (Improving Library Digital Services) grant program.

In addition to direct support to public libraries, the provincial government also funds the Ontario Library Service.

The [Ontario Library Service](#) (OLS) is mandated to deliver programs and services on behalf of the Ontario Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries by:

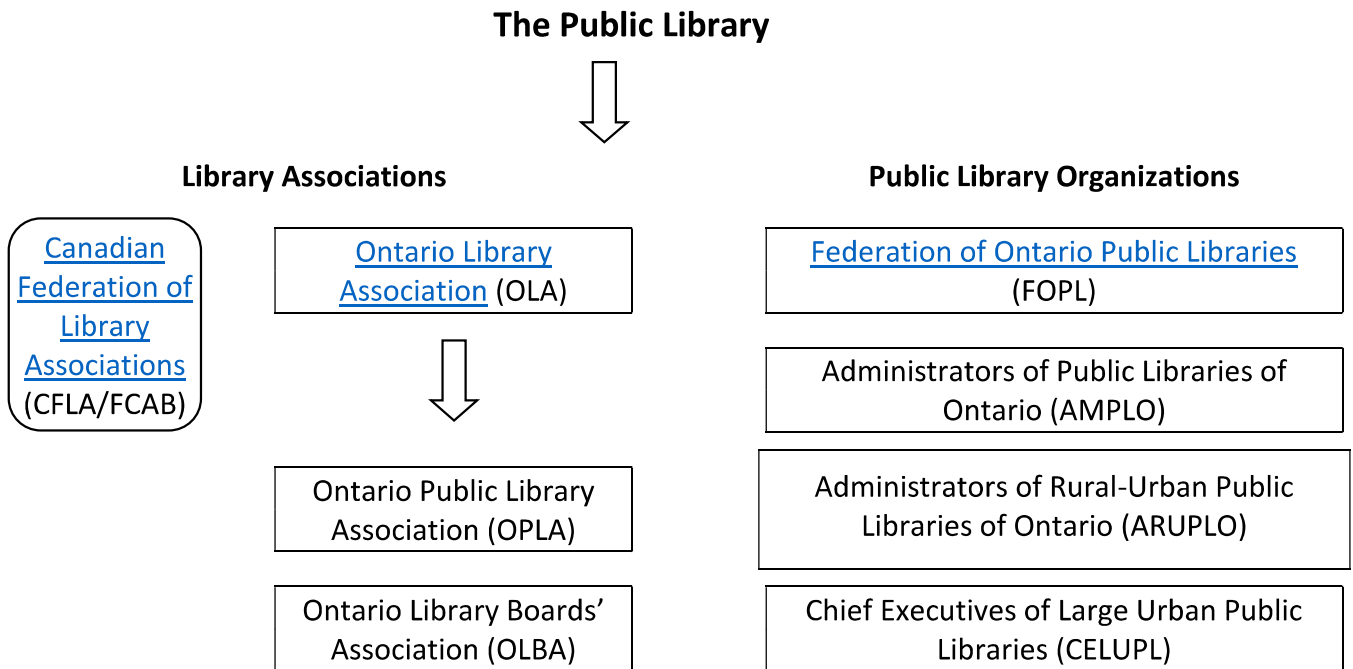
- Increasing cooperation and coordination among public library boards and other information providers to promote the provision of library services to the public
- Assisting public library boards and First Nations public libraries by providing them with services and programs that meet their needs including consulting, training, and development services.

In addition to consulting, training and development services, the Ontario Library Services coordinates services such as interlibrary loan, e-resources licensing and consortia purchasing for the entire province.

Library Associations and Organizations

The Ontario library community is different than any other in the country. The library community is guided by provincial legislation (the *Public Libraries Act*) but library service is a municipal service. For the most part, libraries are governed by library boards which have been appointed by a municipal or county council. We have some municipalities which have joined together to create a union library serving two or more municipalities. Some county residents are served by a county library system, and some counties are served by libraries operated independently by the local municipality.

Outside of the government framework, there are a few supporting organizations – some of which are fee-based membership organizations and some groups of libraries serving a particular type or size of library. The first chart below shows these organizations while the second chart provides more information on these organizations including both government and associations.



Overview of public library organizations in Ontario

Name of organization	Primary roles	Membership
Ontario Ministry (was Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries MHSTCI until June 2022 when it became Tourism, Culture and Sport) www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-libraries	This Ministry has responsibility for the administration of the <i>Public Libraries Act</i> . Different units within the Ministry's Programs and Services Branch administer the funding streams including the Public Library Operating Grants (PLOG), maintain statistics on public libraries and develop provincial policies for the public library system.	Not applicable.
Ontario Library Service (OLS) www.olservice.ca	The Ontario Library Service delivers programs on behalf of the Ministry. OLS provides services to expand local library collections and realize economies of scale (interlibrary loan, consortia purchasing, pooled collections, licensing of e-collections), train staff and trustees and provide information and expertise for local library issues.	Not applicable.
Library and Archives Canada (LAC) www.bac-lac.gc.ca	LAC is a federal institution tasked with acquiring, preserving and making Canada's documentary heritage accessible. Staff at LAC are responsible for administration of the TD Summer Reading Club program and for some interlibrary loan functions.	Not applicable
Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA/FCAB) www.cfla-fcab.ca	CFLA is the national voice of Canada's library associations. The purpose is to champion library values and values of libraries and to influence national and international public policy impacting libraries and their communities.	Membership is through the provincial organization
Ontario Public Library Guidelines Monitoring and Accreditation Council www.ontariopubliclibraryguidelines.ca	The OPLG Council develops, monitors and revises a series of guidelines which are community-based norms for public libraries and public library development in Ontario.	Council arranges Accreditation Audits for those interested in becoming an accredited library in Ontario.

Name	Primary roles	Membership
Ontario Library Association (OLA) www.accessola.com	OLA is a cross-sector library membership association that provides an opportunity for library professionals and volunteers to meet, to share experience and expertise. It provides networking opportunities, education programs, conferences, coordination of mutual interests and needs, lobbying and political action, and related information, services and products.	Membership is open to any individual interested in libraries except OLBA which is open only to library boards. Members typically associate themselves with one of the divisions in OLA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ontario Public Library Association (OPLA) • Ontario Library Boards' Association (OLBA) • Ontario College and University Library Association (OCULA) • Ontario Library and Information Technology Association (OLITA) • Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) • L'Association des Bibliothécaires Francophones de l'Ontario (ABFO)
Chief Executives of Large Urban Public Libraries (CELUPL)	These organizations are all primarily networking groups. They will also take on projects of interest to their membership such as a study of shared-use library facilities or standards and guidelines	Open to CEOs of public libraries serving a population of 100,000 or more.
Administrators of Medium-Size Public Libraries of Ontario (AMPLO)		Open to CEOs of public libraries serving between 15,000 and 100,000 populations.
Administrators of Rural-Urban Public Libraries of Ontario (ARUPLO) aruplo.weebly.com		Open to CEOs of county libraries and lower tier public library systems with a mix of rural and urban branches.
Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) www.fopl.ca	The Federation's strategic focus includes advocacy, research, and marketing.	FOPL is a fee-based membership non-profit with a mandate to support Ontario public libraries.

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