

Appointed to the Library Board?

# What you need to know as a municipal councillor.

**Stronger libraries. Stronger communities.**

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**The Ontario municipal councillor’s guide describes the councillor’s role as “intricate and involved. You will find yourself dealing with complex and sometimes contentious issues. Even the most seasoned councillor will encounter new questions.”<sup>1</sup>**

This description of the complexities of local government and municipal corporations equally lends itself to describing situations you may encounter as a member of the public library board.

Municipalities are complex corporations, funding many other institutions of local government, including the local public library board. Your appointment as a library board member is an extension of your duties as a municipal councillor. Yet, you have a separate fiduciary duty to each of these bodies.

<sup>1</sup> *The Ontario municipal councillor’s guide.* <https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-municipal-councillors-guide#>

# Spotlight: Facts About Library Service in Ontario

(2024 Ontario public library statistics)

## 99%

Public libraries reach 99% of Ontario residents

## 4,825,706

Library Program Attendees

## 8,748

Public computer workstations

## 365

Municipalities and First Nations offer library service directly to their residents or contract for library service with a neighbouring municipality

## 1,140,058

E-learning courses were taken in total by cardholders

### Public Libraries: Community Centred Service

For well over 100 years, public libraries in Ontario have been deeply rooted in their local communities. While the delivery of services and programs have evolved, the constant principles of public libraries remain: free access to reading resources, promotion of lifelong learning, supporting intellectual freedom and fostering community connections.

While steadfast in the commitment to literacy and the access to free electronic and print reading and informational resources, Ontario's public libraries also offer much more than books. Examples include computer and internet access at the library, borrowing wifi hotspots for home use, educational programming for children, and 3D printing and coding classes. Public library staff are leaders in making technology accessible and available to all, and instilling values of lifelong learning.

Today's public library is a community service that benefits everyone. It changes lives and strengthens communities in important ways. The public library is recognized as a vibrant community space where residents access educational and recreational events and resources, study, research, and simply enjoy gathering and connecting with one another.

Public libraries contribute to the cultural, social, and economic fabric of the community. Visiting the library, you will witness one of the most valued resources in your community.

You may encounter:

- A local entrepreneur using a business information database to research market trends
- A family borrowing local museum and provincial park admission passes
- A new parent and their child participating in an early literacy program
- College students working on an assignment in a bookable study room
- A community agency, partnering with the library, to offer services to vulnerable populations.



## The Role and Responsibilities of the Library Board

The Public Libraries Act (PLA) is the provincial legislation that gives municipalities the power to establish public libraries or enter into contracts with neighbouring municipalities for library service. The PLA is the statute that authorizes the library board to make decisions.

The principal duty of the library board is to ensure that your community receives public library service. This is enshrined in the PLA, as the library board is an independent corporation with the legal duty to provide “a comprehensive and efficient public library service that reflects the community’s unique needs” (section 20a).

In practice, this is largely accomplished through ensuring good governance of the library’s management and operations. As the ultimate decision-making authority for the library, most library boards focus their energies on: 1) adopting policies that provide staff with clear guidance for operational decision-making and clear frameworks to act, 2) monitoring the library’s performance and the CEO’s performance, 3) providing strategic guidance (i.e. active role in the development of a strategic plan).

The board’s focus is governance. The day-to-day running of the library and issues related to operations are the responsibility of the CEO and staff. Governance is proactive, future focused, and places emphasis on the relationship of the organization to the community’s development.



## Spotlight: The Library Board’s Obligations and Requirements

- ✓ Offer most services free of charge, as required by the Public Libraries Act (O. Reg. 976).
- ✓ Hold at least 7 public meetings per year (section 16)
- ✓ Appoint a CEO, Secretary, and Treasurer (CEO may also be appointed Secretary and Treasurer) (section 15).
- ✓ Authority to engage employees and rent or purchase real property (sections 15, 19).
- ✓ Submit estimates to Council and to monitor the library’s finances (section 24).



### Governance: The Board and the Municipality

Ontario's system of local government is delivered by various bodies, including municipal councils and a variety of boards and commissions (i.e. police service boards, conservation authorities, health boards). The Public Libraries Act grants library boards the status of a corporation as soon as the library board is established by Council bylaw (section 3(3)).

As such, library boards in Ontario are separate legal entities, which is accompanied by certain obligations and responsibilities.

One example is the library board's status as the Employer of library staff. The library board is required, by the PLA, to appoint a CEO (section 15(2)). The CEO has general supervision over and direction of the library staff. Another example is the requirement to appoint a treasurer and ensure that a bank account, in the name of the library board, is held in order to obtain funds and grants from the Province of Ontario.

Although there are specific areas of autonomy outlined in the PLA, the library board and the municipality benefit when both organizations work together. Many libraries have agreements with their municipalities to provide financial and administrative services, such as payroll, finance, and human resources support. Additionally, many library boards and municipalities adopt similar corporate policies. Facilities is another area where cooperation may lead to substantial cost savings. Many library boards and municipalities have established memoranda of understanding to outline responsibilities in shared administrative and operational costs and services.

Much of the work to align priorities and share services between the library and the municipality will be accomplished by senior staff at both organizations. As a councillor appointed to the library board, you can provide insight and strategic advice regarding the unique aspects of your library-municipal relationship through your familiarity with both organizations.

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## Appointments to the Library Board and Your Role

Councillors appointed to the library board are an important conduit to maintain two-way flow of communication. At the first meeting of its new term or within sixty days of the first meeting, Council appoints a minimum of five residents of the municipality to the Library Board. In lower or single tier municipalities, the majority of board members appointed must be non-council members. Library boards established by a County may be composed of a bare majority of councillors (PLA, section 9).

Some library boards and municipalities have found it helpful to identify the skills and additional qualifications sought in board members and develop a process to evaluate and select candidates that meet the identified criteria. As a member of the library board, you have the same rights and responsibilities as non-councillor members. At library board meetings, councillors vote as a member of the board, and not as a member of Council.

At times, the dual role of Council and board member can present conflicting perspectives or points of view. As a board member of the library, you have a legal obligation to act in the best interest of the library. When you are at a council meeting, you have similar obligations to the municipality. Although it may seem contradictory at times, when voting on matters at either the board or council, it is important that you cast your vote as a representative of the body to which you've been elected or appointed.

**For an online version with links to further information, please visit**

<https://resources.olservice.ca/councillor-conseiller>.

**For resources on library governance, visit the Governance Hub at**

[librarygovernance.ca](http://librarygovernance.ca).



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## About Us

The Ontario Library Service is mandated by the Ontario government to:

- **increase cooperation and coordination among public library boards and other information providers in order to promote the provision of library services to the public; and**
- **assist 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.**

We save Ontario's public libraries money and time through a variety of programs and services, such as bulk ordering. Last year, our electronic resources consortium ordering program saved Ontario's public libraries over \$800,000. For training and learning opportunities, there were 4,868 enrollments by public library staff and board members for 187 events hosted by Ontario Library Service.

**Help is always a quick call or email away.**

As part of our mandate, the Ontario Library Service consultants are available to provide guidance and advice to boards and senior library staff. If your board has questions about legislation affecting libraries, board governance, or any other topic in front of the board, please feel free to get in touch at [consulting@olservice.ca](mailto:consulting@olservice.ca) or call [1-800-387-5765](tel:1-800-387-5765).