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STAFF REPORT
INFORMATION ONLY

Advocacy for Bandwidth, Digital Inclusion and Digital Literacy

Date:	June 19, 2017
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

This report responds to the Toronto Public Library Board's request for information on the Library's advocacy for bandwidth to further digital inclusion.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This report has no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

Expanding Access. Increasing Opportunities, Building Connections, Toronto Public Library's 2016-2019 Strategic Plan identifies technology access and training as a strategic priority and includes strategies to transform the organizational structure, deliver technology services and programs, and increase funding for digital services. Increased access to bandwidth is an integral part of this strategy.

DECISION HISTORY

At the Board meeting on May 15, 2017, staff were requested to provide further information on advocacy initiatives to increase bandwidth at the Toronto Public Library.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Barrier free access to the Internet is essential to participation in the global knowledge economy. Many people are excluded by the barriers of affordability and lack of skills.

The United Nations has declared that freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet is a basic human right and that *"global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies.*"[1]

The UNICEF's *Child Well Being in Rich Countries* includes access to an internet connection on its lists of fourteen indicators or children's well-being, [2] along with *books suitable for the child's age and knowledge level (not including schoolbooks).*

The CRTC has established a universal service objective that Canadians – in rural and remote areas as well as in urban centres – should have access to voice services and broadband Internet access services on fixed and mobile wireless networks. The CRTC is also setting new targets for these services:

- speeds of 50 Mbps download/10 Mbps upload for fixed broadband services;
- an unlimited data option for fixed broadband services;
- the latest mobile wireless technology available not only to all homes and businesses, but also along major Canadian roads[3].

The cost of the Internet in Canada remains high. Families spend between $100 and $212 for communications and in low-income households this expense represents on average, 7.67% of their monthly income, their largest expenditure after shelter, transportation and food. A Canadian study undertaken of residents in a medium-sized municipality found that cost and lack of digital literacy skills and knowledge are major barriers for many.

Currently there is no Canadian, Ontario or Toronto funding program that provides free or preferred rates to public institutions, including public libraries, despite public libraries providing critical access to a large segment of the Canadian population who have limited access to the Internet. The Alberta Supernet is a publicly-subsidized, high speed fibre network connecting Alberta public sector institutions and government service providers, including libraries and schools, and rural and first nation communities, and is a best practice within Canada. There are a number of models of public/private partnerships that advance Internet access, e.g. Sprint's offer of free devices and broadband to 1 million low-income students in the United States[4].

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[1] United Nations. General Resolutions A/HRC/32/L.20. June 27, 2016
https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G16/131/89/PDF/G1613189.pdf?OpenElement

[2] Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries. A Comparative Overview https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc11_eng.pdf

[3] Closing the Broadband Gap. http://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm

[4] http://newsroom.sprint.com/news-releases/sprint-provides-free-wireless-devices-and-service-to-1-million-disadvantaged-students.htm

Toronto Public Library offers range of free, local accessible technology services and supports, available in safe and welcoming environments to advance digital inclusion and digital literacy. Technology services and programs include:

- 24-hour Wi-Fi access;
- access to computers, scanners, printers and current software;
- Digital Innovation Hubs and Pop-up Learning Labs;
- a broad range of training on technology use and creative products from beginner to leading edge; and
- Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending in targeted communities.

COMMENTS

In recognition of the importance of digital inclusion, including affordable, barrier free bandwidth, Toronto Public Library is advocating for increased access to wireless and bandwidth through a number of initiatives.

The Ontario Library Sector

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries of which TPL is a member has successfully advocated for funding from the Ontario Government for funding for rural, northern and First Nation public libraries for increased broadband. The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, Southern Ontario Library Service, and the Ontario Library Association are looking at a potential partnership with ORION, the Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network, on potential federal government funding opportunities.

The City of Toronto

The Toronto Public Library is participating in a number of forums at the City level that are addressing barriers to accessing the Internet.

Smart City Initiative

Toronto Public Library is a member of the City of Toronto Smart City Working Group[5] that is envisioning what a *smarter* Toronto would look like. The Smart City movement is founded in the future-oriented vision of the ability of technology to create a better quality of life through smart government, smart economies, smart environments and smart living. It begins with people having access to technology, resources and networks to develop digital literacy skills. Through participation in the Smart City initative, TPL is advocating for the role of public libraries in advancing digital inclusion and digital literacy. No other public institution in Ontario has the mandate and reach, physical and technical infrastructure, talent and community presence to support digital inclusion and literacy for all.

The Working Group, which includes two representatives from Toronto Public Library, is developing an asset map highlighting Smart City companies, defining a roadmap of Smart City priorities, developing an inventory of the City's divisional "smart assets", and establishing a collaborative forum to leverage Smart City events. Among other issues identified, a lack of affordable and accessible broadband is seen as a key impediment to the

[5] https://www.bot.com/Portals/0/unsecure/advocacy/smartcities2017/

city's competitiveness. Library staff participated in the recent Smart City Summit hosted by the Toronto Board of Trade where the Library's contribution in advancing digital inclusion and digital literacy was noted.

TPL is promoting successful public/private partnerships, including funding, to improve access to the Internet, knowledge and data exchange, including the partnership with CISCO Canada to advance telepresence technology. The Library is working closely with the Foundation on technology initiatives under the fundraising priority, *Innovation: New and Emerging Technologies.*

City of Toronto Broadband Working Group

Toronto Public Library is participating in the Broadband Working Group[6] led by the City's Economic Development Committee in creating an Internet connectivity and broadband capacity review, *covering factors that influence speed, access, reliability and affordability for Toronto residents, businesses and visitors.* The group is considering subscription rates, in both public Wi-Fi zones and specialized networks including, GTAnet and ORION in the research and education sector, and SirtNet for the screen industries. TPL has included information on the importance of public libraries as an access point for wireless, computers, workspace and digital literacy training. The Working Group's report scheduled for release in summer 2017.

Support for the City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy

TPL was identified as the City lead in *expanding digital access and literacy to ensure residents can effectively access programs and services online*. In 2016 and 2017 TPL has expanded Sunday hours to leverage the investment in computers and technology, expanded youth hubs that include access to computers and technology and introduced Wi-Fi hot spot lending in high needs neighbourhoods both to address an immediate need and to address a systemic barrier by creating awareness of the high cost of Internet access in Toronto.

Public Library Standards, Benchmarks and Outcomes for Technology Access

Toronto Public Library is involved in a number of initiatives to establish standards, benchmarks, outcomes and impacts for technology access in public libraries. These initiatives will enable libraries to use comparative analysis for benchmarking and to advocate for the essential role of technology access in public libraries. For TPL, they will help define local technology standards and improve service.

Edge, sponsored by the Urban Libraries Council, is a suite of standards and benchmarks developed to evaluate public library computing and technology services to help libraries create a path for the continuous growth and development of their public technology services. The City Librarian is on the Edge Steering Committee that is updating standards and

[6] **Review of Internet Connectivity and Advancing Toronto as a Smart City.** Economic Development Committee**. Toronto. October 7, 2016**
http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-97202.pdf

benchmarks and developing outcomes for technology access in public libraries. Participation in Edge enables TPL to benchmark and learn from large urban comparator libraries in the United States and Canada.

***Technology Access in Public Libraries: Outcomes and Impacts for Ontario Communities*.** In keeping with TPL's provincial role, and the 2016-2019 strategic plan priority of *expanding access to technology and training* TPL received an Ontario Libraries Capacity Fund Grant to establish benchmarks and outcome measures for technology access for Ontario public libraries. TPL is working with partner libraries, Innisfil, Kitchener, Mattawa, Naotkamegwanning First Nation, Perth and District Union, Wikwemikong First Nation and Windsor to develop and test the toolkit. The draft outcome framework has been submitted as an input to the discussion of Public Libraries and Performance Measures and shared with Edge Steering Committee as an input to their work. Understanding the outcomes of technology access in public libraries for residents of Ontario and how these outcomes contribute to the impact of government strategies in areas such as digital government, ehealth, poverty reduction, education and work force development as part of TPL's advocacy efforts.

The project toolkit and technology platform that:

- builds on research in the public library sector that demonstrates the value proposition of libraries in advancing digital inclusion and literacy;
- provides key performance indictors to measure outcomes in a number of areas: digital adoption and literacy; community, social and civic engagement; creativity and innovation; workforce development; and business development;
- contributes to the sustainability of digital services for communities;
- provides relevant and meaningful context for Ontario public libraries serving diverse communities and their technology needs;
- supports evidence-based decision making, public accountability and open government by demonstrating how public libraries are transforming to meet their mandate.

The Toronto Public Library is participating in the Government of Ontario's roundtable on ***Public Library Standards and Performance Measurement*** in recognition of the critical role that public libraries play in providing public technology access. TPL has proposed the standards to support benchmarking and funding of technology services in public libraries across Ontario including: bandwidth/wireless standard to support digital content, and computers/laptops per capita.

Toronto Public Library's Service Delivery Model

Toronto Public Library is a critical public access point for technology and training. For some people the library is their only access point; for others the library augments what is available at home, school or work. The Library's Service Delivery Model includes a standard for bandwidth of speeds of 50 Mbps download/10 Mbps upload per connection for fixed broadband services and wireless per connection. TPL will work towards achieving this standard for Internet computers and wireless connection.

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SIGNATURE

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