

STRATEGIC PLAN

First Nation Public Libraries

OUR WAY FORWARD

Report
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Prepared by:
First Nation Public Library
Strategic Plan Liaison Committee

Introduction

This Strategic Plan is a guide for developing and improving First Nation public libraries in Ontario over the next five years. It contains a Vision of the public library's role in First Nation communities and outlines important initiatives to be undertaken during this timeframe.

The need to prepare a Strategic Plan to guide the development of First Nation public libraries was identified as an outcome of focus groups that were convened by the Ministry of Culture, the Ontario Library Association, Ontario Library Service – North, and the Southern Ontario Library Service in October 2002. A Liaison Committee consisting of First Nation librarians was formed to prepare the Strategic Plan, with staff support from the Ontario Library Service – North and the Southern Ontario Library Service. The Committee retained the consulting firm dmA Planning and Management Services to facilitate the strategic planning process.

The Strategic Plan was prepared with the input of First Nation librarians. Two workshops were held to involve librarians in northern and southern Ontario. In addition to these workshops, the Liaison Committee commissioned a survey of First Nation librarians and other research to better understand the challenges and opportunities of delivering library service in First Nation communities. This information has been documented in the Environmental Scan Report, provided under a separate cover.

The Strategic Plan will lead to stronger libraries and improved services in First Nation communities that currently have libraries. However, almost two-thirds of First Nation communities do not currently have public libraries. This plan includes actions to address this situation and result in all First Nation communities being served by a public library.

Setting the Context

The characteristics of First Nation communities in Ontario and the public libraries serving these communities set the context for the Strategic Plan. As a whole, Ontario First Nations have a younger age profile, higher birth rates and more rapidly growing population, and lower levels of education and employment than the general population of Ontario. These socio-demographic considerations affect the role played by public libraries in First Nation communities today, and will influence their role in the future.

In 2001, just over one-third (36%) of First Nation communities operated a public library. All of these received operating and most received salary supplement grants from the Ontario Ministry of Culture. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada does not provide direct funding for public libraries. Without the authority to generate tax revenue, few communities have the resources to support the establishment and development of public library services. Other factors that are unique to the development and operation of Ontario's First Nation public libraries, include:

- ◆ Ontario First Nation cultures are still very close to their oral traditional roots.
- ◆ Many champions of First Nation public libraries are in the early stages of educating Band Councils and community members about the benefits of public library service, and developing support for and commitment to it.
- ◆ Many First Nation public libraries are operated by a single librarian with a broad range of responsibilities.
- ◆ Band Council support for public library service tends to take the form of in-kind contributions (e.g., rent, hydro, telephone service).
- ◆ While First Nation public libraries are recognized in the Public Library Act, the requirements relative to these libraries are less restrictive.
- ◆ Ontario's current public library operating grant for First Nation communities is calculated on a per capita basis, based on 1998 population statistics provided by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Given that, the on-reserve population of most First Nation communities has increased significantly since 1998 as a result of a higher birth rate; the current funding is not sufficient to support population-based demand for public library services.
- ◆ Ontario's First Nations Library Consulting Service provides three consultants dedicated to support the development of First Nation public libraries through Ontario Library Service – North and the Southern Ontario Library Service.
- ◆ The remote locations of most First Nation communities result in high cost-of-living/cost-of-doing-business.
- ◆ Many First Nation public libraries are governed by either Band Councils or, if so designated by Council, their communities' education departments.
- ◆ The governance or supervision of many First Nation public libraries by education programs and the subsequent location of public libraries in school buildings makes it difficult to establish a public library identity.

- ◆ The Indian Act requirement of Band Council elections every two years doubles the frequency of potential political turnover.
- ◆ Most First Nation public libraries do not have independent governing authority with a mandate to approve the public library's budget.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

Consultation with the First Nation public library community also revealed that strategies are required to:

- ◆ More quickly harness the benefits of available and affordable information technology that provides access to information.
- ◆ Place greater attention on promoting lifelong learning and literacy.
- ◆ Promote the benefits of providing public library services in partnership with other appropriate community programs.
- ◆ Provide more training and professional development opportunities for First Nation librarians.
- ◆ Identify new mechanisms for the public library to build support at the federal, provincial, and community level.
- ◆ Secure stable financing from Band Councils and other supporters of First Nation public libraries.

The First Nation public library community also identified the challenges of improving First Nation public libraries, including:

- ◆ The public library will be pushed to do more and must have a focus. The library will fail if it tries to be all things to all people.
- ◆ Community financial resources are currently stretched and many communities do not consider the public library a priority at this time.
- ◆ The traditional source of tax revenue for non-native public libraries does not exist for First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Limited financial resources make it difficult to maintain public Internet access terminals in First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Any future federal support for First Nation public libraries will likely have a nation-wide scope. Consequently, a Canada-wide Aboriginal library group must advocate the benefits of the public libraries for Aboriginal communities – a challenge much larger than developing a Strategic Plan for developing First Nation public libraries in Ontario.

RELEVANT THEMES

The Liaison Committee identified Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) associated with First Nation public libraries (summarized in Appendix A). Based on the SWOT and consultation with First Nation librarians, the following themes were identified to capture the unique characteristics of First Nation public libraries – characteristics that are reflected in the Strategic Plan.

The First Nation librarian has a deep connection to the community. In most cases, the librarian will have personal and family ties to the community and will be a part of the social fabric and networks in the community. This connection to the community places the librarian in a unique position to ensure the library and library services respond to special needs and interests of residents.

The concept of public library service is emerging in First Nations communities. The public library is developing as an important source of recreational reading, information and an institution that can preserve and promote cultural traditions.

The public library provides many programs to community members. The public library, as a principal conduit of information in the community, is in a unique position to support the programs of other service providers – including health, education, employment, and economic development. In many First Nation communities these functions are closely integrated.

The public library is a public meeting place where all community members feel welcome and comfortable. The public library offers materials that support a full range of learning and leisure needs and can be a focal point in First Nation communities.

A strong public library enhances ongoing education of all residents. The public library will support children in our schools, but must also be a centre for information, cultural and personal affirmation, and lifelong learning for all members of the community.

A First Nation public library requires the support of the Chief and Band Council. These leaders make important decisions about how community resources are allocated. Community leaders must recognize the benefits of the public library.

Many First Nation communities in Ontario are geographically isolated. It is expensive to build and maintain public buildings in geographically isolated communities. The use of technology and virtual library services will play a special role in meeting needs in these communities and in supporting First Nation librarians.

A First Nation public library is often the only public Internet access facility for community members. This function requires public libraries to provide and maintain computers and other equipment, for which funds are often insufficient. It also requires that library staff be available to assist Internet users locate, evaluate, and use electronic information successfully.

The Strategic Plan for First Nation Public Libraries in Ontario

The Vision Statement

Public libraries provide an essential service to First Nation communities. Our Chiefs and Councils lead our communities in recognizing and supporting our public libraries as vital contributors to growth and change. With current and culturally relevant collections and services, First Nation public libraries welcome all community members and support their needs for access to information, personal empowerment and self-affirmation. In partnership with other community programs, our public libraries contribute to our social and economic well being by nurturing our spirits, preserving our traditions, cultures and languages, and encouraging lifelong learning and literacy.

Goals for the Next Five Years

Goal 1 – Advocacy and Promotion:

To promote the importance and value of First Nation public libraries to our First Nations leadership organizations, federal and provincial funders, Chiefs and Councils, and communities.

Goal 2 – Funding:

To secure sustainable funding for First Nation public libraries.

Goal 3 – Staffing:

To enhance the delivery of public library services with a trained and stable work force responsive to the communities it serves and supported by the Chiefs and Councils.

Goal 4 – Facilities:

To provide appropriate facilities to serve as public libraries and gathering places for people and community programs.

Goal 5 – Services:

To provide First Nation public library services that reflect the needs and interests of our communities, encourage literacy, promote a lifelong love of reading, learning, and cultural enrichment and demonstrate the power of community partnerships.

Goal 6 – Collections:

To ensure all First Nation communities have access to public library materials in a variety of formats that meet the diverse needs and interests of community members.

The strategic directions and action plans that will allow First Nation public libraries to realize these goals are discussed in the following sections of the report.

In many cases, the action plans build on existing programs and products. These actions are not intended to duplicate what has already been accomplished by the public library community in Ontario. Rather, in all cases, the intent is to identify resources that are available, evaluate their relevance and applicability for First Nation public libraries, revise these resources as required, and encourage their use.

This strategy is for all First Nation communities in Ontario, including those that do not currently have public library services. The action plans are intended to support the development of public library services on a province-wide basis and to benefit all First Nation public libraries. While preparing this plan, a number of actions that were more applicable at the local level were identified. We have documented these in the strategy. All First Nation librarians are encouraged to review these actions, and if they are useful suggestions, pursue them in their communities. These local projects will support the goals of the strategy, and in turn be supported, as the province-wide initiatives are put in place over the next five years.

Finally, no attempt has been made to identify the parties responsible for implementing the actions identified in this strategy. In many cases, the actions will be a shared responsibility and a number of organizations will work together to make them happen. More work will be undertaken after this strategy is adopted to identify all of the parties that will participate in its implementation.

Goal One: Advocacy and Promotion

Promoting the importance and value of First Nation public libraries to our communities, Chiefs and Councils, First Nations leadership organizations, and federal and provincial funders is an essential part of this strategy.

Goal 1: Advocacy and Promotion

To promote the importance and value of First Nation public libraries to our First Nation leadership organizations, federal and provincial funders, Chiefs and Councils, and communities.

1.1: Secure the support of First Nation and other political leaders for well-developed public libraries in First Nation communities.

- ◆ Identify provincial champions of First Nations public libraries and involve them in promotional campaigns.
- ◆ Continue to make improvements to the First Nations Public Library Week promotional program.
- ◆ Identify new partners to contribute to the ongoing development of the First Nations Public Library Week promotional program.
- ◆ Champion the concept of First Nation public libraries at regional, provincial, and national gatherings of Chiefs and Band Councillors.

1.2: Promote community awareness of First Nation public libraries as an essential service.

- ◆ Conduct research to identify the social and economic impact of public libraries in First Nation communities.
- ◆ Design an advocacy campaign to position the public library as an essential service provider in First Nation communities.

Implementing this Goal in Your Community

- ◆ Attend Band Council meetings on a monthly basis and submit monthly library updates.
- ◆ Identify champions of the public library in your community and involve them in all promotional activities.
- ◆ Arrange a meeting with your Chief to talk about the importance of continuously improving the public library.
- ◆ Invite key supporters of First Nation public libraries to your community on a regular basis.

Goal Two: Funding

Public libraries in First Nation communities must have more resources. They require ongoing support from the Federal Government, the Government of Ontario, and Band Councils. Innovative options for financing First Nation public libraries must also be explored.

Goal 2: Funding

To secure sustainable funding for First Nation public libraries.

2.1: Encourage the Federal Government and the Government of Ontario to expand funding for First Nation public libraries in Ontario.

- ◆ Advocate for funding programs to provide public libraries in First Nation communities from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and other Federal Government departments, such as Heritage Canada.
- ◆ Share the Ontario First Nation Strategic Plan with other First Nation library organizations in Canada and support a coordinated appeal from all provinces and territories for Federal Government funding for First Nation libraries.
- ◆ Develop a campaign for the Chiefs of First Nations in Ontario to advocate for sustainable funding for First Nation public libraries from the Federal Government.
- ◆ Encourage the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to support a pilot project as a means to evaluate approaches to funding First Nation libraries.
- ◆ Encourage the Ministry of Culture to review the provincial operating grant formula relative to population-based funding to ensure available resources are allocated in a manner that recognizes the unique and diverse needs of First Nation communities, including small populations and geographical isolation.
- ◆ Investigate opportunities for a start-up funding program for First Nation communities that currently do not provide public library services, without taking from funding for existing First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Investigate the potential to coordinate inter-governmental/inter-agency grant or funding programs that support the establishment of and on-going support to First Nation public libraries.

2.2: Encourage Band Councils to supplement funding for First Nation public libraries.

- ◆ Prepare and distribute information that encourages Chiefs and Band Councils to provide supplementary funding to First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Identify funding to assist First Nation public libraries in developing specific library components.
- ◆ Provide budget planning and presentation support to the First Nation public library workforce.

2.3: Explore innovative options for financing First Nation public libraries.

- ◆ Encourage businesses to consider partnership opportunities with First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Negotiate funding opportunities with non-traditional library supporters.

Implementing this Goal in Your Community

- ◆ Use grant funding from different sources to develop components of your library.
- ◆ Share information with your Band Council about how other First Nation communities are developing their public libraries.
- ◆ Provide an annual report to your Band Council that indicates how the library was used and the benefits associated with current funding.

Goal Three: Staff

First Nation librarians have strong family and social ties to the communities in which they work and live, placing them in a unique position to understand and respond to community needs. However, to serve the community, they require appropriate training and professional development, appropriate compensation, and recognition and support from community leaders and members. This strategy supports the development of staff resources in First Nation public libraries.

Goal 3: Library Staff

To enhance the delivery of public library services with a trained and stable work force that is responsive to the communities they serve and supported by the Chiefs and Councils.

Strategic Directions

3.1: Ensure that on-going and appropriate training and professional development opportunities are accessible to all First Nation librarians.

- ◆ With the input of First Nation librarians, identify training requirements, preferred approaches to training and factors affecting participation in training programs.
- ◆ Identify barriers and develop programs that will assist First Nation public library staff to more fully participate in professional development opportunities.
- ◆ Identify existing training programs that may be relevant to First Nation library staff and investigate partnerships with the agencies offering this training.
- ◆ Identify and regularly promote professional development and training opportunities for First Nation librarians.
- ◆ Investigate opportunities to provide training in isolated communities through distance education programs.
- ◆ Promote scholarships currently available for First Nation librarians interested in pursuing post secondary education in the area of library or information studies.

3.2: Ensure the First Nation librarians are appropriately compensated, recognized, and supported.

- ◆ Research employment characteristics of the First Nation public library workforce and similar-sized non-native public libraries in Ontario and develop standard job descriptions with corresponding salary recommendations.
- ◆ Develop an education and awareness program for Chiefs and Councils to document the role of the librarian and the public library.
- ◆ Review existing material, and adapt if necessary, a resource manual that suggests ways in which First Nation communities can establish and govern a public library.
- ◆ Encourage First Nation librarians to participate in provincial public library recognition programs.
- ◆ Investigate the potential for the political and territorial organizations to offer leadership recognition programs specific to First Nation public libraries.

3.3: Develop a strategy for First Nation librarian succession planning.

- ◆ Develop a campaign to promote the benefits of a career as a First Nation librarian.
- ◆ Continuously improve First Nation librarian mentoring programs to attract and train individuals for a career as a librarian.
- ◆ Promote the benefits of volunteering at First Nation public libraries and formally recognize the efforts of volunteers on a regular basis.
- ◆ Secure funding for job placements, career counselling, and to support participation in library conferences and training events for individuals interested in a library career.

Action Plans

Implementing this Goal in Your Community

- ◆ Identify training and development opportunities in your annual work plan to the Band Council.
- ◆ Make presentations to the Chief and Band Council after attending a training and/or education seminar.
- ◆ Encourage young people to sample library work through summer placements, project work and job shadowing.
- ◆ Encourage volunteerism in your library.

Goal Four: Facilities

Ensuring that all First Nation communities have access to facilities that are accessible to all community members and provide a welcoming space to meet, learn, and grow is an important part of this strategy. Appropriate library facilities must be provided. The use of technology and virtual library services will also play an expanding role in meeting the facility needs in these communities.

Goal 4: Facilities

To provide appropriate facilities to serve as public libraries and gathering places for people and community programs.

Strategic Directions

4.1: Ensure that appropriate public library facilities are available to serve First Nation communities.

Action Plans

- ◆ Advocate for a capital funding program for constructing or making improvements to First Nation public libraries in Ontario.
- ◆ Maintain a detailed facility profile of all First Nation public libraries in Ontario.
- ◆ Prepare and encourage the use of library design guidelines that respond to the needs of First Nation communities and public libraries.
- ◆ Investigate ways of providing library services in small and remote First Nation communities where it may not be feasible to provide a library building.

Implementing this Goal in Your Community

- ◆ Investigate opportunities to locate the public library with other community buildings.
- ◆ Before a new community facility is constructed in your community, see if a new public library space can be provided as part of it. Talk to your public library consultants to see how they can help.
- ◆ Integrate community art into the library's physical environment.
- ◆ Provide comfortable reading, working and meeting spaces in the library.
- ◆ Coordinate community presentations and demonstrations at the library on topics of community interest to showcase the facility and bring people into the library.

Goal Five: Services

Public libraries promote lifelong learning and encourage literacy¹. Public libraries support the education and personal interests of the growing population of First Nation children and young people. At the public library, adults and elders can access information, new ideas and skills that may help them in their jobs and in their personal lives. Ontario First Nation communities must have access to these services. Providing quality public library services that meet the needs of all community members of Ontario First Nations is an essential part of this strategy.

Goal 5: Services

To provide First Nation public library services that reflect the needs and interests of our communities promote a lifelong love of reading, learning, and cultural enrichment, encourage literacy, and demonstrate the power of community partnerships.

Strategic Directions

Action Plans

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| 5.1: Improve and expand public library services to First Nation communities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Share innovative program and service success stories as a means of inspiring and supporting First Nation public library colleagues.◆ Review and update, if necessary, existing standards and guidelines that specifically address the unique needs of all types of First Nation public libraries.◆ Encourage First Nation public libraries to continuously evaluate and improve the quality of library services provided.◆ Provide training and support to First Nation public libraries to ensure accurate input to the annual Ontario Public Library Statistical Survey. |
| 5.2: Develop partnerships with other community programs to enhance services and better meet community needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Research relevant best practice models of community program-public library partnerships in First Nation communities and document successful partnerships.◆ Identify mutually beneficial partnership opportunities among First Nation public libraries and other community program providers.◆ Identify ways to effectively support First Nation public libraries pursuing partnerships with community program providers.◆ Advocate for a multi-agency funding program to support pilot projects involving First Nation public library partnerships with other community providers. |
| 5.3: Support effective literacy programs in First Nation communities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Document successful literacy and literacy support programs currently involving First Nation public libraries.◆ Promote literacy campaigns and programs provided by the community literacy program.◆ Investigate opportunities to establish an inter-governmental initiative that would support partnerships between local literacy programs and the public library in First Nation communities. |

Implementing this Goal in Your Community

- ◆ Host a community meeting to discuss how the public library can develop partnerships with local programs.
- ◆ Bulk purchase materials for the library with other local program providers.
- ◆ Run programs in the library that support literacy.
- ◆ Share success stories to inspire other First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Participate in local cultural celebrations (e.g. National Aboriginal Day, local heritage celebrations) to promote the public library.

¹ In this Strategic Plan, the term “literacy” refers to English language literacy.

Goal Six: Collections

This plan will support the development of First Nations public library collections that are relevant to the needs of the community, available in a variety of formats, and address a wide range of topics. The public library collections must serve personal interest and growth, self-empowerment and educational purposes. The technology to deliver electronic content, and where appropriate to manage collections, must also be present and up-to-date.

Goal 6: Library Collections

To ensure all First Nation communities have access to public library materials in a variety of formats that meet the diverse needs and interests of community members.

6.1: Improve the quality and size of First Nation public library collections.

- ◆ Continue to provide collection development and management support to First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Develop First Nation public library collection development guidelines and a core collection list to assist First Nation public libraries in selecting materials.
- ◆ Continue to investigate and promote opportunities to bulk-purchase materials on behalf of interested First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Promote the benefits of participating in a First Nation public library rotating collection service.

6.2: Ensure First Nation public libraries have the technology required to deliver electronic content and effectively manage library collections.

- ◆ Continue to identify and promote outside grant and funding opportunities for technology improvements in First Nation public libraries.
- ◆ Continue to support and promote access to electronic content through the negotiation of library consortium purchasing arrangements.
- ◆ Identify ways in which remote and isolated communities can utilize information technology to provide and/or enhance library services.

6.3: Ensure First Nation public libraries can acquire culturally relevant materials.

- ◆ Advocate for the development of a funding program to assist First Nation public libraries to acquire culturally relevant materials.
- ◆ Provide support for the development of a First Nation public library on-line database of culturally relevant materials.

Implementing this Goal in Your Community

- ◆ Accept donated material that matches the needs identified in your collection development profile.
- ◆ Represent the interests of the public library on community interest groups working to bring better broadband Internet access to your community.
- ◆ Provide instruction to patrons requiring assistance using the internet and other library resources.
- ◆ Secure, and if necessary, budget for annual computer upgrades and maintenance in the library's annual operating budget.
- ◆ Work towards securing a collection development budget, and if necessary, dedicate a percentage of it to acquire culturally relevant materials.

Appendix A: SWOT

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (SWOT)

The Liaison Committee identified the:

- ◆ **S**trengths of First Nation public libraries that can be built on when identifying Action Plans;
- ◆ **W**eaknesses that must be overcome;
- ◆ **O**pportunities to take advantage of; and the
- ◆ **T**hreats that must be addressed to ensure library services survive and prosper.

The **SWOT** is summarized in the following Tables.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Librarians are committed to developing their communities. They have PASSION. - Librarians know the people in their community and understand the social issues and community dynamics. The librarians are the “7-11” for community resources and information. - Working with other community institutions, librarians act as a social advocates by delivering programs and services which promote literacy, learning and healthy lifestyles. - Residents perceive the library as a positive community place that builds self-esteem. - Libraries protect the community’s collection of First Nation materials. Today’s generation of children have increased access to materials available in their language and materials that are culturally significant because of the library. - Many First Nation public libraries have computers and Internet access. - The support of the Ontario Public Library Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Library funding is neither secure nor consistent, making it difficult to plan and set priorities. - Funding for libraries may be a reflection of the priority of library services relative to other community issues and concerns. Frequently Band Councils will place a high priority on housing, economic development or other infrastructure improvements. - Limited funding means limited resources for librarian/staff salaries relative to other employment opportunities in First Nation communities. Staff turnover is high due to low wages. - The remoteness of many First Nation communities makes it costly to deliver services. There are limited opportunities to network with other librarians in First Nation communities and at off-reserve public libraries. - The level of political support for and community awareness of the library is low. - Many library facilities are too small and are not easily accessible for community residents. - Limited funding is available to maintain existing resources (replace computers, etc.). - There is an absence of a “library tradition” in most First Nation communities; there is a need to foster this tradition and ensure libraries are seen as an essential institution in the community.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The role and mandate of the library can be integrated with those of other community institutions. The library can support other high priority community issues, such as education, health, and employment. - The library can play a role in improving child and adult literacy. - First Nation librarians are known in their communities and often work with other staff to provide services to community members. There is an opportunity to build the public library by encouraging First Nation librarians to foster relationships with community members and other local program providers. - A growing on-reserve population suggests growing demand and justifies a lobbying effort to garner more support. - A shifting demographic structure with more young people and young families is an opportunity to emphasize the importance of library services. Effectively serving these sectors of the community will be critical to the library's success. - The "virtual library" can serve remote communities, especially as efforts to get or increase bandwidths are made by service providers. - First Nations Public Library Week is increasing the profile of First Nation public libraries and will be a solid basis for service improvements in the future. - First Nations are getting more profile in the federal and provincial scenes and consequently, more potential is being identified for the library to play an expanded role in the community. - By working in partnership with other community organizations there may be increased potential for accessing grants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased demand may result in lower levels of service (quality and quantity) if funding is not increased accordingly. - Political change – Band Councils change due to more frequent elections, thus it is more difficult to build a solid basis of continuing support and funding. - Continued staff turnover results in loss of staff resources and necessitates new staff starting over to build a relationship with the community and Band Council, and knowledge of public libraries. - Demand might outpace space available in facilities for the library.