



HARNESSING THE POWER OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE ACROSS NOVA SCOTIA

NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR PROVINCIAL LIBRARY FUNDING FORMULA
DEVELOPMENT

COUNCIL OF REGIONAL LIBRARIANS (CORL)

NOVA SCOTIA PUBLIC LIBRARIES

May 2023




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Executive Summary

The current Provincial Funding Model for public libraries, which provided a flat funding rate for five years, comes to an end in FY 2024-25.

Members of the Council of Regional Libraries (CORL) met in February and March 2023 to set a vision for public libraries, determine core services that align with that vision, and identify funding priorities and an approach to funding discussions for FY 2025-26 onwards.

There is consensus that public libraries are increasingly playing a transformational and essential role in our communities. Libraries have significantly expanded the scope of services offered and embraced their role as vibrant community hubs. The pace of change for libraries is quickening as evidenced by new collaborations, new services and new capital projects.

Provincial funding, however, has not kept pace and Nova Scotia libraries are facing challenges providing the open hours and level of services our communities are asking of us. Many libraries in Nova Scotia are experiencing wage parity issues, which is making it difficult to attract and retain staff with the broad-ranging competencies required to deliver modern library services.

Nova Scotia Regional Libraries: Values, Mission, Core Services, and Vision

Regional library boards are united in endorsing the following guiding principles for Nova Scotia public libraries, as developed by CORL in 2023.

What We Value as Public Libraries

- Universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for the social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well-being of individuals and communities, and freedom of expression embodied in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our collections, services, programs, facilities, and communications.
- Lifelong learning and literacy support in all its forms.

Mission

Nova Scotia's libraries inspire hope and create the conditions for each of us to improve our individual and collective well-being so that our communities can thrive.

Core Services

Libraries enable people to participate fully in society by:

- Connecting people with community and government information and services
- Fostering lifelong-learning and literacies in all forms.
- Providing free, equitable access to collections of current and diverse materials.
- Creating public spaces that are open, welcoming, and accessible to everyone.
- Sharing experiences and activities that enrich lives and community connections.

Vision

To create the conditions, province-wide, that enable libraries to be transformational in each community. This is achieved through the following means.

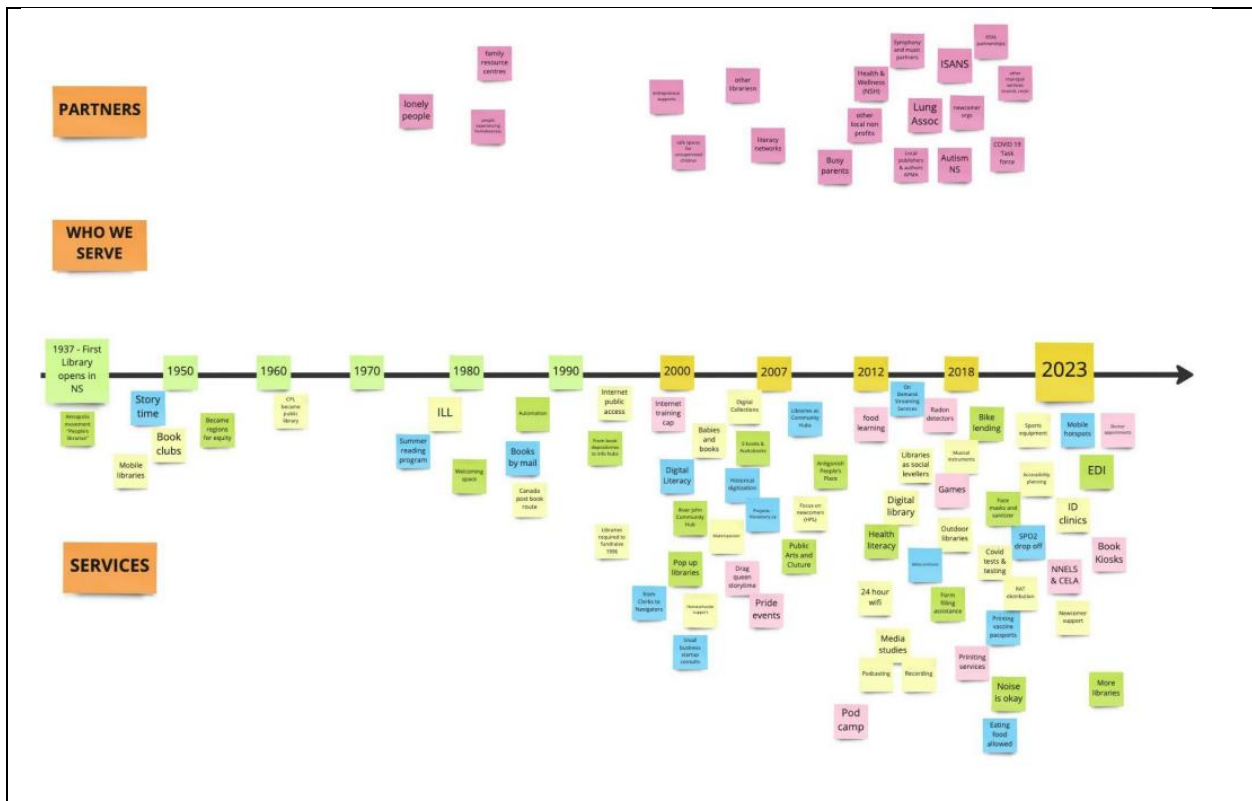
- Staffing. A full complement of well-supported staff receiving a standardized salary relevant to their job duties and comparable to like-sectors. These staff are well trained and able to help community members who engage with a public library. Sufficient staff to allow for the hours of service and level of service that communities require.
- Collections. Robust, rich, and accessible collections in a variety of formats. Accessible to all Nova Scotians.
- Programming. Flexible and innovative experiences and activities to meet community needs and aspirations.
- Facilities. Purpose-built libraries meeting the needs of each community. Open seven days a week. Accessible, adaptive, environmentally conscious, and celebratory in design.
- Partnerships. Libraries and staff that can engage with government, municipal and other sector partners fully. To engage with Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities respectfully and meaningfully.

The Situation in Public Libraries Today

Expanded scope of public libraries

Public libraries are among the last remaining community hubs in communities across Nova Scotia. Libraries play an essential role in public information and service delivery within communities, which has been acknowledged by both community and government partners.

The following image depicts a timeline from the creation of the Nova Scotia Provincial Library in 1937 to present time. As demonstrated below, the scope of work and the ways in which the library integrates with partner organizations has increased significantly over the last twenty years. Funding for libraries over that time frame has not increased at a level that matches the increased scope of work.



What we have learned since the last funding review

Much has happened in our communities and libraries since the last funding review was held in 2017. The public, community, and government partners have turned to libraries to meet a wide variety of needs. This has resulted in the following lessons from the last funding review.

- Funding has not increased at a level that matches the increased scope of work and has not kept pace with economic and social change.
- Libraries are critical leaders in responding to a range of local and provincial needs (across multiple departments/roles) and have the desire, and the robust provincial network, to continue to do so.
- The inadequacy of current provincial funding is negatively impacting operations and staffing in the following ways:
 - Difficulty retaining and attracting qualified staff due to salaries below the living wage.
 - Staff layoffs and branch closures are required to balance budgets if funding remains status quo.
 - In 'making do' for so many years, libraries are struggling to keep pace with labour code standards, including changes to minimum wage.
- Library visits, programming participation, and borrowing has rebounded and exceeded pre-pandemic numbers.
- Social needs in communities, including support for newcomers, and responding to gaps in health and local government services, require more staff than libraries can currently afford.
- Some communities are investing in new, modern, purpose-built buildings as the public expects more from libraries. These facilities are wonderful, however there is inadequate operating funding to run these facilities optimally.

Primary concerns facing public libraries

CORL has identified the following primary concerns facing public libraries:

- Insufficient staff compensation, affecting recruitment and retention.
- Pressure on collections from increasing demand and cost, especially with respect to e-resources.
- An ever-increasing scope of service illustrates the relevance of libraries, but places demand on staff and library systems.
- A clear, predictable, and stable funding model is required.
- Libraries must be accessible and welcoming and much of the library infrastructure needs to be retrofitted or replaced.
- The reliance on public libraries for Wi-Fi and digital access requires continual upgrades to technology.

Funding Priorities – Public Libraries Want Transformation

Recognizing that public libraries have been underfunded for an extended period of time, transforming libraries will require a significant funding plan. However, the other options are holding on or losing ground. We saw in the last funding formula what holding on looks like. With flat and one-time increases to meet the current fiscal challenges, it means reductions in services and programs and no ability to take on government priorities. Losing ground or receiving no increase would be disastrous, turning back the clock by decades. Every library is well positioned to be responsive to community and government needs the following funding priorities will need to be addressed.

- Staffing. Living wages, wage parity with similar sectors, and benefits for employees, as well as the funds to employ sufficient staff to provide the hours and standards of service that communities require.
- Operations. The ability to meet the increasing costs of operations such as facilities costs (e.g. rent, security guards where applicable), back-end technology, professional service fees, insurance, banking, and shipping of materials across the province to support broad access to materials for all Nova Scotians.
- Collections. Achieving industry per capita standards for collection, both physical and digital, and including supporting infrastructure such as ILS/Discovery Layer development.
- Technology. Up to date and relevant software for both public and staff. Other technology infrastructure, digital security and training. Lendable technology and printers/scanners.
- Accessibility. Accessible spaces for public and staff; accessible hours; accessible collections; borrow by mail services; accessible programming.
- Programming. Trained and well supported staff to carry out programming. Adequate staffing in smaller branches, technology trainers, virtual programming, evaluation frameworks, supplies and resources, and honorariums to recognize skills of presenters.

Next Steps

1. Endorsement of Needs Analysis for Funding Formula Development Final Report by regional library boards. (May 2023)
2. CORL and Boards to communicate and engage with our key partners and stakeholders to tell them of our vision, current situation, and priorities. (Summer 2023)
3. CORL will build a base of research to inform a transformation of library service to Nova Scotia. This will also include the risks to communities if the status quo is maintained. CORL will seek funding for a contracted researcher to collect the necessary background data and information collection to inform the Funding Formula Review Committee work. Seek funding for this work. (Summer-Fall 2023)
4. Province, with input from CORL, to establish Terms of Reference for Funding Review Committee. (Fall 2023)
5. Funding Review Committee established by Province. (Late 2023)
6. Funding Review Committee work complete. (February 2024).
7. CORL to collaborate with province on stakeholder engagement and communications throughout the entire process (Ongoing).

Contact Us

Council of Regional Librarians

The Council of Regional Librarians (CORL) is a committee of the Chief Executive Officers from the nine regional library boards. CORL represents and supports the interests and concerns of regional librarians in Nova Scotia for the benefit of the regional libraries, boards and most importantly, citizens who use the libraries of Nova Scotia.

The CORL Chair for 2023-24 is Åsa Kachan, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Librarian of Halifax Public Libraries.

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