



Ontario Public Library  
Guidelines Monitoring  
and Accreditation Council

Le Conseil de l'agrément et du  
contrôle des lignes directrices pour  
les bibliothèques publiques de l'Ontario

## Ontario Public Library Guidelines Introduction *2023 Edition*

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Since 1987, the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Monitoring and Accreditation Council has published the *Ontario Public Library Guidelines*. While the seventh edition was published in 2017, in 2020 a decision was made to publish more continuous updates through an Annual Update released at the beginning of each year. The current edition is the 2023 edition.

### What are the Guidelines?

All Ontarians, regardless of where in Ontario they live and work, have a right to public library service that meets basic, widely accepted norms of library practice and service. The Guidelines are essentially a developmental tool. They provide a self-regulated process, designed to analyze the state of development of a public library and to measure itself against a set of objectives, widely accepted guidelines. They also provide public library boards, managers and staff and local governments with up-to-date public library guidelines on policies, resources, and services. Individual public libraries can choose to follow or exceed these Guidelines, regardless of whether they decide to pursue accreditation.

A further voluntary step in this self-regulated process enables a public library to submit its services to an external assessment and seek accreditation by its peers. The accreditation audit process is described in detail in the document entitled “**OPLG Accreditation Process: Information for Libraries.**”

## **Who is responsible for the Guidelines?**

The guidelines presented represent community-based norms for public libraries and public library development in Ontario. They are developed, monitored, and revised by a broadly-based group, representative of the Ontario public library community called the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Monitoring and Accreditation Council. This Council was established in 1987 by the Ontario Public Libraries Strategic Directions Council (SDC).

## **Purpose of the Guidelines**

The purpose of the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Monitoring and Accreditation Council is threefold:

1. To monitor the continuing effectiveness of the Guidelines and make revisions as required.
2. To arrange for peer audits of those public libraries which so request.
3. To bestow the special designation of "Accredited Ontario Public Library" upon those public libraries that successfully complete the Guidelines accreditation process.

## **Goals of the Guidelines**

The Guidelines have four principal goals:

1. To build upon and improve the current Ontario-wide public library system and its governance through updated guidelines and policy frameworks.
2. To maintain and enhance strong public library operations including services, information technology, and spaces supported by updated standards that all size libraries can meet or exceed.
3. To make available to public libraries a comprehensive development tool based on standards and guidelines, to raise the level of public library service province wide.
4. To recognize, through an accreditation process, the achievement of those public libraries which meet and exceed the Guidelines requirements.

## Benefits of the Guidelines

- *Evaluation of local library service and direction for development*  
The Guidelines facilitate an organized, objective approach to the evaluation of local library service. The Guidelines ensure that a local evaluation process is fair and comprehensive, concentrating neither on strengths nor weaknesses, but giving direction to and assistance with a review of the whole spectrum of services and operations.
- *Improved accountability*  
By using the Guidelines, the library can demonstrate the quality and value of library service currently being offered to the public and improves accountability to the taxpayer. By adhering to a province-wide set of expectations, the individual library is in a better position to benefit from co-operation and sharing arrangements with other libraries in a province-wide library system, thereby demonstrating a commitment to maximizing local tax dollars.
- *Assistance in the planning process*  
Use of the Guidelines provides the library with an understanding of those matters which require attention and upgrading and those which are considered appropriately developed or superior in their function. From this assessment of the adequacy of current service delivery, the board and administration can consider appropriate directions for development of the library and formalize these into an organized plan.
- *Consistency of service across Ontario*  
Regardless of geographic location or size, a public library which meets the requirements of the Guidelines is assured that it is equipped to contribute to the Ontario public library infrastructure, to the greater benefit of its users and community.
- *Enhancement of the library's position in the community and with funding bodies*  
The Guidelines, and the plans developed because of their application, assists boards in providing justification for securing municipal and other funding to implement the plans. Libraries achieving accreditation through the Guidelines program reap the benefits of an enhanced profile and reputation in their communities and demonstrate to their funding bodies that tax dollars invested in the public library are dollars well-spent.

Libraries should consider discussing the accreditation process early on with their governing body, present it as an opportunity to work together on an important project and encourage council to be part of the process. This has the effect of increasing the council's awareness of the work involved in accreditation, as well as its value and benefits.

You may also want to read "Benefits of Accreditation for Ontario Public Libraries" *Municipal World*, December 2013.

## Organization of the Guidelines document

The present editions of the Guidelines are separated into “system-wide” elements and those which require “site observation”. There are five system-wide areas:

- I. Governance/Administration
- II. Planning Documents & Process
- III. Policy
- IV. Personnel & Human Resources
- V. General

Under the ‘site observations’ section, there are two sections:

- VI. Collections & Services
- VII. Physical & Facilities

The total number of guidelines for this audit is 175, with 119 guidelines in the system-wide section and 56 in the ‘site observation’ section. It is possible that the total number of guidelines for both the system and ‘site observations’ sections required for a library system may be reduced if a specific guideline is deemed to be ‘not-applicable’, e.g., if the library is a single floor facility or does not have a public meeting room.

If a library wanted to use the Guidelines as a self-assessment tool, then they would want to achieve a “yes” response to each of the guidelines. If a library wanted to go through the accreditation process, a library system must achieve no less than a 90% score of total possible points in Sections I to V and must achieve no less than a 90% score in **each** of the five topic areas. In addition, a library system must meet any guidelines the Council designates as mandatory. Similarly, for a library branch to receive accreditation, it must achieve no less than a 90% score of total possible points in Sections VI and VII. Where a library system has more than one branch, the overall score will be calculated from the score for the system-wide score plus the score given to the main library in the observation section. The score for the second and subsequent branches will be used to determine if that individual branch passes the accreditation audit.

## Appendix 1

### Terms used in the *Ontario Public Library Guidelines*

The main element of Ontario Public Library Guidelines documentation is a checklist of standards to which a library would answer “yes” or “no” and then tabulate a score for the library system. To ensure that everyone understands the terms used in the OPL Guidelines document, this list of terms used is provided. The definitions should be read before working through the checklist to ensure consistent understanding of each term.

**Assessment of Service Hours (Guideline 7.4):** “The open hours of the library reflect the needs of its community and include evenings and/or weekends. During the last four years the library has assessed how well its open hours match community need. Where there are multiple branches, each branch's hours are tailored to its surrounding community.” As this Guideline is about an assessment of service hours, it was noted that the focus was on assessment of hours, so that if a library had completed an assessment and decided against evening or weekend hours, then the requirements of this guideline would be met.

**Branch** - A stationary service outlet within a library intended to deliver a range of library services to a designated area of the community.

**Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** - The position which bears overall responsibility for managing the operations of the library and its staff. The title used by individual libraries may differ, e.g. Chief Librarian, City Librarian, Library Director, Program Director.

**Community Information Referral**– The public library may have an important role to play as a source of general information about community organizations and events provides referrals to other local organizations programs and services.

**Governing Body:** While most municipal, county or union libraries operate with a public library board, there are some public libraries in Ontario which operate under different governance structures. In First Nation communities, the library is commonly governed by the Band Council. Special legislation previously passed allows four county/regional library systems to operate under a committee of council rather than a board. The term “governing body” has been used to incorporate all situations found within Ontario public libraries.

**LEED (Guideline 28.11):** LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and it is the most widely used certification system for green buildings throughout the world. LEED offers various certification frameworks, adapting to the needs of all types of projects. The certification is based on accumulating points across various sustainability categories, and there are four certification levels based on the score obtained: Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum.

**Mandatory Guideline** - A guideline, designated by the symbol **M**, which must be met in order for a library to receive accreditation.

**Policy** - Policies are tools that aid in governing and fulfilling the library's mission. A library's policy manual is a written set of statements that form a framework to assist the library staff in making day-to-day decisions. Policies grow out of, and give definition to, the library's mission in the community, and they provide the basis for consistent operational procedures.

**Policy Governance Model (Carver):** While most library boards have responsibility for approving library policies, a library governing body operating under the "Policy Governance Model" (commonly called Carver Model) would have created a governance structure in which the CEO creates the majority of the Library's policies, which are not usually put to the governing body for approval. In this edition, the guidelines have been written to accommodate both Carver and non-Carver governing bodies.

**Population served** - The total number of residents of the community served by a library, including the residents of communities which contract with that library for service.

**Procedure** - Procedures detail how things are to be done. Once policies are set, library staff can develop procedures and make decisions within the realm of established policies. Procedures are specific directions, established by the staff, to implement the library policies. While boards are concerned with the 'what' of library operation, staff are concerned with the 'how'.

**Readers' advisory service (Guideline 25.2):** The process of matching users with materials, and materials with users. It answers questions dealing with users' leisure needs rather than with their information needs.

**Reference service (Guideline 25.1)** - Library staff provide reference service to customers by responding to their information needs and which meet the unique library needs of specific populations.

**Service outlet** - A stationary or mobile facility for delivering public library service.

**Statement** - A written communication or declaration setting forth facts, particulars, and/or position on a specific topic.