



## Ontario Public Library Guidelines

### Introduction

Revised in 2026

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#### 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, whereby a public library can measure itself against a set of objective, widely accepted guidelines. They also provide public library boards, managers, 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. Public libraries can choose seek accreditation through a peer audit.

#### Who is responsible for the Guidelines?

The guidelines are maintained 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 Council

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

1. To monitor the continuing effectiveness of the Guidelines and make revisions as required.
2. To accredit public libraries.

#### Goals of the Guidelines

The goals of the Guidelines are:

1. To build upon and improve the Ontario-wide public library system and its governance.
2. To maintain and enhance strong public library operations and services in Ontario.

3. To be applicable to libraries of all sizes.

### **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 a fair and comprehensive review of the whole spectrum of services and operations.
- *Improved accountability*  
By using the Guidelines, the library can demonstrate the quality of library service currently being offered to the public and improves accountability to the taxpayer and funders.
- *Assistance in the planning process*  
Use of the Guidelines provides the library with an understanding of those areas which require attention or improvement and those areas where they excel or meet the standard. The board and administration can utilize this assessment as a part of their planning process. The Guidelines can assist governing bodies and administration in providing justification for securing municipal and other funding to implement plans or changes identified through accreditation.
- *Consistency of service across Ontario*  
The Guidelines are objective standards that can be applied to public libraries across the province.

Libraries should consider discussing the accreditation process early on with their governing body to increase their 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.

## OPLG Accreditation Process: Information for Libraries

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Use of the *Ontario Public Library Guidelines* is voluntary. An accreditation is valid for a five-year period and libraries are notified as a re-accreditation audit is required. During an accreditation audit, an audit team will work with library staff to go through the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Self-Assessment document to determine how the library measures against the Guidelines. In this process,

1. the library is required to achieve all the mandatory or legislated guidelines (marked as M or L); and
2. the library system and at least one physical location must achieve a score of 90% in each of the seven sections.

An accreditation audit is completed virtually. An in-person audit can be requested, and Council will consider the request and associated additional fees on a case-by-case basis.

### Preparing for an audit

1. In preparing for an audit, please ensure that you are working with the most recent version of the Guidelines as posted on the [OPLG Council](http://www.olservice.ca) website.
2. Request the audit by emailing [guidelinescouncil@olservice.ca](mailto:guidelinescouncil@olservice.ca). Audits can be conducted in English or French.
  - Please provide a minimum of eight (8) weeks' notice of your intended audit date. This will allow enough time for your library to upload necessary documents and for the OPLG Council to prepare. All audit requests should be made by September 15<sup>th</sup>.
3. Upon receiving a request for an audit:
  - a peer audit team will be appointed by the OPLG Council.
  - A peer audit team will arrange the time for the observation portion.
4. The fee for a virtual audit is a flat rate of \$200. It is billed through OLS.

### Process

#### Step 1 – Explore MS Teams

As part of the preparation work, OLS staff will provide you with a link to MS Teams that has been set up just for your library accreditation work.

- You should find a copy of the version of the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Self-Assessment that will be used for your audit.

- You will see the location where you will upload the necessary documentation (the evidence) using the instructions provided below.
- You should also see a folder which includes examples of documents used in previous audit uploads.

## Step 2 - Annotate the OPLG Self-Assessment

Review the OPLG Self-Assessment and indicate in the status column if your library meets (“Y”) or does not meet (“N”) the guideline. If there is a guideline that you feel is not applicable to your, (e.g. If a branch is a single-story building), mark it as “N/A”. Describe why it is not applicable in the notes. If the audit team agrees that the guideline is not applicable, it will be omitted from the total number of questions and not used in calculating the 90% score.

**Please note** that if you have already annotated your own copy of the *OPLG Self-Assessment*, you do not need to transfer your data to this new file – and may simply upload your existing annotated *OPLG Self-Assessment*.

## Step 3 – Evidence

Using the annotated *Self-Assessment* as your framework, you will need to provide evidence for some of the elements. Evidence can include:

- information from the library’s website (the specific location should be linked on your annotated *Self-Assessment*),
- written explanations within your annotated checklist,
- Uploaded documents, photos, videos, or other appropriate proof.

The library must provide all documentation for Areas 1 to 5 (System-wide guidelines) but is encouraged to also submit any photographic evidence which may be more difficult to experience on a virtual tour for areas Section 6 and 7. Examples might include parking lots where Wi-Fi may not be strong enough for a virtual tour or directional signs which are not onsite. These are the areas, sections, and the number of statements in each area:

Area #	Section #	Number of questions or statements	Number of Legislated or Mandatory items
#1 Governance & Administration	Sections 1 to 6	32	22
#2 Planning Documents & Process	Sections 7 to 11	23	8
#3 Policy	Sections 12 to 15	28	20
#4 Personnel & Human Resources	Sections 16 to 18	19	17
#5 General	Sections 19 to 23	22	6
#6 Collections & Services	Sections 24 to 26	22	7
#7 Physical & Facilities	Sections 27 to 30	30	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>176</b>	<b>85</b>

The expectation is that auditors should be able to easily locate your supporting evidence. For larger documents, Council recommends adding a note to “see” a section or specific page within your evidence. Auditors understand that some policies, procedures, or documentation may account for one or more guideline. In the below example, the library noted that the policy related to Harassment is included under 12.3.

LEVEL - System <small>(One form for your whole system)</small>	Examples/Clarifications - Examples are not exhaustive or prescriptive	Status (Y/N or N/A)		
		Mandatory /Legislated	(whether you have the item or not)	Evidence (Teams Location or Link)
<b>Section 12: Safety, Security &amp; Emergencies</b>				
<b>Safety, Security and Emergencies Policy</b> - The governing body is responsible for providing a safe and secure environment for library staff and for members of the public who use public library services. The library maintains a policy that addresses safety, security, and emergency issues.		L		12.1 Health and Safety
<b>Working Alone</b> - The library maintains policy pertaining to staff and volunteers who work alone in the library or other designated sites (as required by the OHSA).	This may be included in another Health & Safety policy and does not have to be a standalone policy.	L		12.2 Work Alone
<b>Workplace Violence</b> - The library maintains policy that adheres to relevant provincial and/or federal legislation on workplace violence and sexual violence (as required by the OHSA).	This may be included in another Health & Safety policy and does not have to be a standalone policy.	L		12.3 Respectful Workplace
<b>Workplace Harassment</b> - The library maintains policy that adheres to relevant provincial and/or federal legislation on harassment and sexual harassment (as required by the OHSA).	This may be included in another Health & Safety policy and does not have to be a standalone policy.	L		12.3 Respectful Workplace

## Naming Conventions

Each guideline is numbered for the section – 1.1., 1.2, etc. Any uploaded evidence should be labelled for easy review and retrieval by the audit team. The names should include reference to the **actual OPLG Guideline** number and the name of the local file. For example:

- 14.5 Trillium Public Library programming policy.pdf
- 27.4 Trillium Public Library Road Sign West End.jpg

For files which provide evidence to support several guidelines, indicate the broad category or range of guidelines.

- General A – Trillium Public Library Brochures
- Board By-law – Trillium Public Library Board By-laws
- Guidelines #'s – Trillium Public Library Social Media Posts

For all uploaded evidence also note and/or link the file name in your annotated *Self-Assessment*. This assists the audit team in locating your evidence.

## Step 4 – Review of materials

The audit team will review the annotated *OPLG Self-Assessment* and the other documentation that was uploaded to determine whether the specific guideline was met.

The library can expect to receive feedback after the upload deadline and no less than two weeks prior to the Observation step. This has been done to allow ample time for the library staff to respond to any requests for additional evidence. Additionally, if policy, plans, or other evidence needs to be developed, this gives the library time to start the process.

## Step 5 - Observation Sections of OPLG Checklist (Sections 6 & 7)

The audit team will observe each of the library branches.

### A. Virtual Tour Method

Members of the audit team will need to be shown all areas of the public library required by the Guidelines. During the tour demonstrate and guide the audit team through each of the guidelines found in Sections 6 and 7.

This portion must be done in real time and not submitted to the audit team in recorded video format. The OPLG Council, in trust, will assume the public library system being audited will not purposefully hide or obstruct any areas of the library.

Council recommends that a mobile device be used to conduct the tour. We will be using ZOOM. We also recommend having a team of two staff members or volunteers provide the tour. That way, one person can be a “camera/device person” and another person can give the tour and provide the necessary evidence and information.

### B. In-person Tour Method

The audit team will visit the main facilities and all branches within the system. If there are staff at the other locations, it is not necessary that the CEO join the team on its tour of the facilities. The team will review the Guidelines within Sections 6 and 7 for each location. Email the [OPLG Council](#) for consideration. Sections 1-5 would still be reviewed virtually.

## Step 6 - Audit Reports

1. The audit team will provide the library with a general report indicating the result shortly following the audit and **before** the report goes to the OPLG Council for consideration.
2. In the written report, the audit team will state whether the library is to be recommended to the OPLG Council for accreditation or not.
3. If the library does not meet the required standard, the report will indicate which items require attention and set down a timetable within which these items may be upgraded to the appropriate standard without there being a need for another full peer audit. Similarly, a library which fails to meet one or more guidelines designated as mandatory will be given an opportunity to correct the situation.
4. If the library is **not** able to respond within the timetable given by the audit team, they will not be recommended for accreditation. Information will be provided as to where the library may get assistance in helping it to meet the Guidelines in future.

After time for a review, the library must confirm with the audit team that they agree with the findings of the team. Once confirmation is received, then a copy is provided to OPLG Council. Details of the audit report will remain confidential.

### **Step 7 - Accreditation Review by OPLG Council**

1. Once the OPLG Council received an Audit Report they will review it at their next meeting and may approve the recommendation.
2. Where the OPLG Council approves an audit team's recommendation, Council will formally recognize the library as an Accredited Ontario Public Library.
3. An Accredited Ontario Public Library will receive an accreditation certificate. The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport will be invited to sign the certificate. The certificate will be co-signed by the Chair of the OPLG Council and, whenever possible, presented at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference Library Awards Gala or other appropriate function.

## Appendix 1 - Terms used in the Ontario Public Library Guidelines

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 *Self Assessment*.

**Assessment of Service Hours (Guideline 7.4):** This Guideline is about an assessment of service hours. 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 provides general information about community organizations, services, and events.

**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. The term “governing body” has been used to incorporate all structures.

**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.

**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 are specific directions, established by staff, to implement policies.

**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.

**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.