Guidelines
For Rural/Urban Public Library Systems
2nd edition

Administrators of Rural and Urban Public Libraries of Ontario

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Guidelines for Rural/Urban Public Library Systems are a developmental tool for rural/urban and county libraries. The Guidelines are expressed as targets for a library to provide an appropriate level of service for its community; they have been developed by the Library Administrators of ARUPLO public libraries based on:

- their considerable collective expertise;
- comparative data and research regarding other jurisdictions;
- trends and changes in rural/urban Ontario.

The Guidelines are for the overall library system serving a municipality, with selected guidelines for branch service delivery within the system.

Libraries must conform to provisions of the Municipal Act, the Public Libraries Act, and other relevant legislation and are accountable to the communities they serve. Reports on general efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery are annual requirements for all libraries. However, there is also a need for more specific guidelines and best practices relevant to rural/urban public libraries in Ontario.

These guidelines build on and are supplementary to the Ontario Public Library Guidelines. It is recommended that the Ontario Public Library Guidelines (OPLG) be fully considered in conjunction with the ARUPLO Guidelines. At the time of writing of this document, the current version of the Ontario Public Library Guidelines is the Fifth Edition, which can be found at: http://fopl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/file_OPLG_5th_edition.pdf.

The Intended Use of the Guidelines

ARUPLO Libraries have made the following commitments with respect to the guidelines:
- The guidelines and best practices describe an appropriate level of service for ARUPLO Libraries;
- The guidelines and best practices will be used on a regular basis by ARUPLO Libraries to evaluate current and plan future library services;
- While the guidelines and best practices will be used in conjunction with other similar products, including the Ontario Public Library Guidelines, they are considered most applicable to the multi-branch rural/urban nature of the ARUPLO library systems.

2. TRENDS AND CHANGES IN RURAL/URBAN ONTARIO

The Guidelines for Rural/Urban Public Library Systems identify appropriate service levels that reflect the changing nature of municipalities and public libraries serving rural and rural/urban Ontario. Rural/Urban Ontario refers to those communities that are close to large urban centres and that have integral service, schooling and shopping relationships with urban areas.

Rural Sustainability

Changing demographics are placing increasing pressures on the sustainability of rural communities including the ability to provide an array of services, such as public libraries. The face of rural communities is changing rapidly as a result of increased urbanization across Ontario, an aging population, and the impact of technology on rural lifestyles. Rural communities need to find creative ways to sustain themselves and attract new residents.
Factors affecting rural sustainability include:

Economic:
- Rural life is based on much more than agriculture; only a small percentage of rural residents work in agriculture. Much of modern agriculture is industrialized, intensified and automated.
- Dominant rural employment is small- to medium-sized manufacturing and services.
- New technologies support the growth of rural employment in knowledge-based, cultural, and creative occupations. Technology now supports more telecommuting and working from home. Therefore high-speed connectivity and information and communications infrastructure is very important.
- Out-migration as young people leave rural areas in search of education and tend not to return for employment.
- Many rural residents commute to a city for work or are self-employed.

Environmental:
- Urban residents want a reliable, healthy food supply and sources of clean water which are supplied by rural communities.

Social and Cultural:
- Steadily increasing populations through attraction of more diverse, urban, educated and retired people to rural areas for a different quality of life.
- Cottages and seasonal residences are being renovated to become permanent and retirement homes.
- Growing rural populations of ex-urbanites looking for low density settlements.
- Lack of public transit options creates car dependency and mobility problems for lower income, retired and student populations.
- Increase in outdoor and tourism-based economic and social activities (eco-tourism, agritourism, skiing, ATVs, snowmobiling, fishing, hunting and trail development)
- New rural residents specifically choose a rural residence because it is a good place to raise children.
- New rural residents tend to be affluent and more cosmopolitan and want urban-type services.
- New rural residents bring with them broader service level expectations.
- Shortage of recreational opportunities for children and teens.
- Rural society is based on social gatherings, community involvement and relationships.

Libraries and Rural Sustainability

Many of the above factors have implications for public libraries and the services they provide to their rural communities. The key to rural development and rural sustainability is a more informed and innovative community.

- Public libraries must have a high level of Internet connectivity in order to provide access to web-based information, electronic databases and connectivity for those who may not have access at work or home.
- Public libraries must have an advanced Internet presence and active social networking that provides access to a wide range of virtual library services.
- Public libraries must provide access to information resources from beyond the community.
- Public libraries are taking on a greater municipal, provincial and federal services delivery role, whether through their physical presence in the community or as an access point for electronic information.
- Some rural/urban residents, especially those who commute to urban areas for their jobs or services, will use city library services; therefore public libraries should arrange for borrowing privileges in neighbouring cities and towns.
- Public libraries should be built in existing village and town clusters or rural service centres.
Access to post-secondary education is important to rural sustainability. Public libraries should form partnerships with post-secondary institutions to support student success and facilitate the delivery of e-learning and post-secondary services, including library services to the rural community.

Illiteracy is a barrier to a community’s success. Public libraries should work with community agencies in the delivery of programs and resources that encourage literacy.

Public libraries should assist in the collection, organization and dissemination of information and should form part of the communities’ innovation capacity.

Rural governance is sometimes ‘traditional’ in its thinking and not always accepting of the new rural realities brought about by demographic and technological change. Rural leaders should be made aware of efforts being made to sustain rural communities.

Based on the strategic importance of public libraries in sustaining rural communities, the following guidelines and best practices are required.

3. GUIDELINES

3.1 Guidelines

Guidelines define a level of service or a preferred manner of delivering a service that can be measured and is adopted as a minimum target appropriate for all ARUPLO libraries. Guidelines are expressed as targets for a library to provide an appropriate level of service for its community. Examples of guidelines include size of library space per capita, open hours per week, or collection items per capita. While guidelines might be further defined as mandatory (implying failure to meet the guidelines carries some penalty), this was considered but rejected by ARUPLO librarians.

3.2 Branch Definitions

Many multi-branch systems serving rural areas seek creative ways to provide service to a variety of different communities. Service delivery options may be known locally as deposit stations, outposts, bookmobiles, book/media lockers, dispensers or depositories, or may still be called “public libraries” or “library branches” as there had historically been one there. However, it is neither feasible nor desirable to try to create guidelines for solutions that attempt to address unique and local circumstances. Every Library System will have to address its own rationale for the existence, creation, or “grandfathering” of such local solutions. As a best practice, it is highly recommended that any such options be dealt with in the context of the Library System’s strategic planning process and addressed by a service delivery plan.

For purposes of this document, four types of branches have been identified:

- Small Branches: Branches serving from 1,000-5,000 population
- Medium Branches: Branches serving from 5,000-10,000 population
- Large Branches: Branches serving from 10,000-35,000 population
- Urban Branches: Large urban branches located within a Rural/Urban Library System serving populations 35,000 or greater.
3.3 Library Planning and Evaluation

3.3.1 Minimum Population/Circulation Transactions to Support a Library

The minimum population required to support a branch library is 1,000 people located in the catchment area for the branch.

The catchment area is the area from which users are drawn to a particular library service point. Catchment areas and the population contained therein can be determined by branch library surveys, census data, information from county or municipal offices, Canada Post postal code areas, and the information collected by school boards.

Each branch should generate a minimum of 8,000 circulation transactions per year.

3.3.2 Geographic Location of Branches

The location of branches should be determined by the catchment area and their proximity to other community or commercial centres or services.

3.3.3 Facilities

Library facilities should be developed to meet local community needs, library service strategies, projected populations and compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, building standards, other regulations and municipal policies. Planning documents are available to assist with ensuring public libraries meet their local needs. Examples of these documents are:


The following minimum guidelines are based on assignable library space for staff work areas, programs/services, collections, seating and all required service areas.

- Small Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 1,000-5,000 population
  Minimum 2,500 sq. ft. or 1 sq. ft. per capita in the library’s catchment area, whichever is greater

- Medium Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 5,000-10,000 population
  Minimum 5,000 sq. ft. or 1 sq. ft. per capita in the library’s catchment area, whichever is greater

- Large Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 10,000-35,000 population
  Minimum 10,000 sq. ft. or 1 sq. ft. per capita in the library’s catchment area, whichever is greater

- Urban Branches: Large urban branches located within a Rural/Urban Library System serving catchment area populations of 35,000 or greater
  Minimum 35,000 sq. ft. or 1 sq. ft. per capita in the library’s catchment area, whichever is greater.
3.3.4 Hours of Operation

Public libraries operate in an increasingly 24/7 environment. The single greatest barrier to library use as reported in community needs assessments is time. Library hours of opening must be accessible if they are going to meet an enhanced mandate of government services outlet, public access computing centre, and community gathering place. The hours of operation for a system, including virtual hours, have to begin to approximate a 24/7 model if they are going to meet public expectations. Minimum hours of operation by library type are noted. In most cases a range is provided, and it is expected that libraries serving populations at the upper end of the range will also have open hours at the upper end of the range.

- Small Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 1,000 – 5,000 population
  20 - 25 hours per week

- Medium Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 5,000-10,000 population
  25 - 35 hours per week

- Large Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 10,000-35,000 population
  35 - 60 hours per week

- Urban Branches: Large urban branches located within a Rural/Urban Library System serving catchment area populations of 35,000 or greater
  65 hours per week.

3.3.5 Staff

With increasing public expectations, technology-based services and operations, and the fundamental change in library services, all library employees require formal library education and training. The following guidelines indicate both the minimum number of staff and their professional qualifications. Other desirable approaches to staffing are described as best practices in section 4.

These guidelines are based on the organizational, communication and operational challenges of staffing a multi-branch system and ensuring a professional team is in place to deliver and manage all functional requirements of a full library system.

Definitions:

- Professional librarians are defined as having a Master’s degree in library or information science from an accredited university.

- Library technicians are defined as having a diploma in library techniques from a community college.

- The EXCEL Certificate Program in Small Library Management is a distance education program for library workers without formal library training and is administered by the Southern Ontario Library Service.

- FTE = Full-time equivalent.

Each library system has professional librarians that are used on a system-wide basis. The Library Administrator for each system is a professional librarian. One third of all system-wide staff are professional librarians; For every 10,000 people or part thereof, one of the full-time equivalent staff is a qualified librarian.
In addition to minimum staff levels indicated in the guidelines, staffing should correspond to workload. The demands of library service transactions per staff hours can be used as a guide, with 13 transactions per staff hour providing adequate time to deal with circulation and reference work.

- Small Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 1,000 – 5,000 population
  
  Post-secondary and/or library training
  Excel and/or Library Technician training
  2.5 FTEs (includes administration, system functions and service delivery)

- Medium Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 5,000–10,000 population
  
  Branch Supervisor: Professional librarian or post-secondary and library training
  Branch Assistant: Excel and/or Library Technician training
  2.5 – 5 FTEs

- Large Branches: Branches serving catchment areas of 10,000–35,000 population
  
  Branch Supervisor: Professional librarian
  2 FTE professional librarians
  For every additional 10,000 people or part thereof, 1 FTE professional librarian
  5 FTEs – 17.5 FTEs

- Urban Branches: Large urban branches located within a Rural/Urban Library System serving catchment area populations of 35,000 or greater
  
  Branch Supervisor: Professional librarian
  2 FTE professional librarians
  For every additional 10,000 people or part thereof, 1 FTE professional librarian
  Minimum 17.5 FTEs.

3.3.6 Collections

The following guidelines were adopted for collections; an appropriate collection is a variety of materials responsive to specific community needs. These guidelines have been developed at a time when the publishing industry for physical/print publications is in considerable flux and transition. Within this context there is a recognition that:

a) Collection materials include a variety of physical, print and digital formats, and system-wide electronic resources;
b) Physical or print publications will continue to be an important component for ARUPLO communities;
c) Resources are shared among branches;
d) Collections are responsive to each community’s needs.

The following guidelines refer to the number of physical items of any format located at each branch.

- Small Branches: Branches serving from 1,000-5,000 population
  
  3 - 5 items per capita
  Minimum 7,500 items

- Medium Branches: Branches serving from 5,000-10,000 population
  
  3 - 4 items per capita
  Minimum 15,000 items

- Large Branches: Branches serving from 10,000-35,000 population
  
  3 items per capita
  Minimum 30,000 items
• Urban Branches: Large urban branches located within a Rural/Urban Library System serving populations 35,000 or greater
  2 -3 items per capita
  Minimum 70,000 items.

3.3.7 Technology  (See Sections 6.5 to 6.7 in the *Ontario Public Library Guidelines*)

Every library system should have:

• Access to an Integrated Library System which includes a public access catalogue of library holdings;
• A library-based Internet presence that provides access to Web-based information sources (e.g., information about the library, library catalogue, virtual reference services, government and municipal information, community information, links to other library collections, on-line databases, etc.), and provide trained staff to assist the public in the effective use of these information sources;
• An active social networking presence.

Each branch should have:

• High-speed, effective, reliable, Internet access and public access workstations with high-speed access to the Internet and the online catalogue, and the ability for the patron to duplicate (copy, print, etc.) from the Internet or online catalogue content or images.
• A minimum of three public access workstations. Branches that serve populations over 2,500 should have one additional workstation per 1,300 population.
• Access to the collection of the entire system by means of the Integrated Library System.
4. BEST PRACTICES

Best practices applicable to ARUPLO libraries are noted in this section of the document.

Best practices describe an optimal level of service or manner of providing services that may or may not be measurable. In addition, it is acknowledged that unique local circumstances may affect the validity or importance of a best practice and they may not apply to all library systems in every circumstance. Examples of best practices include space and staff allocations for services to special groups.

4.1 Facilities

4.1.1 Space Allocations by Use and Function

- **Seating (Users)**: 5 user spaces per 1,000 capita @ 30 sq. ft. per user space
- **Children's Area**: A children’s self-contained area of from 20 to 40% of a library's total assignable area
- **Teen Area**: 5% of total sq. ft. allocation
- **Staff Work Room**: 15% of total library space

4.1.2 Branch Location

Members of the public travel no more than 30 minutes in a motorized vehicle under normal driving conditions to access basic library services offered by their municipal library system or by another municipal library system.

4.2 Staffing

**Staff Continuing Education and Training**

The library encourages and provides opportunities for continuing education and training for its staff and makes provision for this in its policy, its long-range plan, and in its budget to an amount not less than 2.5% of the total staff budget (e.g. by providing in-house training programs, financial support for staff to enroll in the EXCEL Certificate in Small Library Management program, or to attend library conferences and other training programs and events). Cross functional, system wide training is recommended for all staff.

4.3 Collections

**Adult/Children Mix of Volumes**

In general, two-thirds of a branch library collection consists of adult material with one-third consists of children's and young adult material.

**New or Emerging Formats**

A best practice for a minimum number of non-book items in the book stock includes multiple formats. 25% of the acquisitions budget is spent on non-print formats including online databases and multi-media.

**Acquisitions**

Each branch has an up-to-date collection, with a minimum of 50% of the materials purchased or published within the last seven years.
4.4 Services

4.4.1 Services to Children (See Section 4.4 in the Ontario Public Library Guidelines)

Every library system has a children’s services program which includes:

- Children’s areas designed to be welcoming, joyous and fun, with vibrant colours, inspiring artwork, and furniture that is child-sized and that encourages play. Children’s spaces celebrate childhood and make every child feel special and welcome;
- A trained professional children’s librarian in the system;
- A children’s librarian or designated staff member for coordinating children’s services at every branch;
- A children’s collection which is at least 1/3 of the total collection.

4.4.2 Services to Seniors

Every library system has a seniors services program which includes:

- A staff member who has responsibility for the provision of library services to seniors;
- Access to special format collections (e.g. audiobooks and large print books), specialist collections such as adult education, and library programs targeting seniors;
- Deposit collections at seniors homes, nursing homes, etc.;
- Delivery of materials to people who are unable to leave their homes.

4.4.3 Services to Teens (See Section 4.5 in the Ontario Public Library Guidelines)

Every library system has a teens services program which includes:

- A staff member who has responsibility for the provision of library services to teens. When the library system exceeds 100,000 population served, the system employs a professional librarian with training in service to teens. When a library branch exceeds 35,000 population served, the branch employs a professional librarian with training in service to teens.
- High quality computers with Internet access, software, web-site development tools, and graphic and multi-media capabilities;
- Teen areas designed to be welcoming and fun;
- Contemporary and popular books and materials (magazines, graphic books, non-book materials); multiple copies of favorite books. At least 5% of the annual additions are for teens;
- Involving teens in library planning; encouraging teens through paid work, community service and volunteer opportunities;
- Delivery of teen programming e.g. writing workshops, teen adult author readings, film nights.

4.4.4 Services to First Nations

Services to First Nations include provision of library services and materials to First Nation communities served by rural/urban public libraries and to First Nations peoples resident within rural/urban communities. According to Our Way Forward: A Strategic Plan for Ontario First Nation Public Libraries, public library services contribute to the preservation of the traditions, cultures and languages of First Nations and encourage lifelong learning and literacy. This resource can be found at:

http://www.ourwayforward.ca/

Where a library system serves a population of 1,000 or more identifying as members of First Nations, the library system conducts a needs assessment of this population group in order to determine that:

- Library services reflect the needs and interests of First Nations, encourage literacy, and promote a lifelong love of reading, learning, and cultural enrichment.
- Library collections are in a variety of formats that meet the diverse needs and interests of First Nations.
4.4.5 Services to Francophones

Services to Francophones include provision of materials that reflect the bilingual nature of Canadian society. The library system delegates a staff member with responsibility for the provision of library services to Francophones. Collection standards for Francophone collections are based on the collection standards outlined in Section 4.3 of this report. At a minimum, rural/urban libraries provide between 3 - 5 volumes per capita for the Francophone population served.

4.4.6 Services to Multicultural Groups

A multicultural library service includes provision of materials that reflect the multi-cultural nature of Canadian society and the demographics and diversity of the population served. The collection supports the culture of the community. Where a library system has a population of 2,500 or more identifying as users of a non-English and non-French language the library system provides collections and services for that population. At 1 volume per capita the minimum system-wide collection in a qualifying language is 2,500 items.

4.4.7 Services for People with Special Needs

Every library system provides programs and services for people with special needs, including:
- An appropriately skilled member of staff responsible for coordinating services for people with special needs, including staff training and professional development skills;
- Access to resources in a variety of formats and at different levels of difficulty for special needs and specific disabilities;
- Access to range of equipment (assistive devices) to enable people with a disability to access the collections and services of the library;
- Every library branch provides barrier-free access to library services and resources for people with disabilities and special needs.

4.4.8 Literacy Services

Every library system actively promotes and supports programs for members of the community with identified literacy needs. These programs include:
- Liaison with those involved in literacy programs to determine needs and areas of library support for existing and planned programs;
- Children’s programs, such as story hours, reading programs and summer reading programs which are important tools in developing literacy during the critical early years;
- A collection development policy for the acquisition and management of literacy materials to meet documented needs.

4.4.9 Community Information (See Section 4.8 in the Ontario Public Library Guidelines)

The public library has an important role to play as a source of general information about community organizations and events. A key to rural development is a more informed and innovative community. Rural/urban public libraries:
- Assist in the collection, organization and dissemination of community information;
- Be a clearinghouse for current information on community organizations, issues and services;
- Maintain a community information and referral service or co-operate with other community agencies to provide this service.
4.4.10 **Local History and Genealogy** *(See Section 4.9 in the *Ontario Public Library Guidelines*)

Local history materials are uniquely valuable materials in a public library collection and of special interest to local communities. Digitizing local materials will ensure broad access and preservation:

- The public library takes a leadership role in ensuring that local history materials are digitized and made available;
- The Local History Collection is housed in a secure area of the library.

4.5 **User Education**

Each library offers public education programs on a regular basis to ensure that the public has access to basic training in library use and in accessing the information resources offered at the library.

The library offers access to the Internet and training on how to use it.

4.6 **Resource Sharing** *(See Section 5.1 of the *Ontario Public Library Guidelines*)

4.6.1 **Inter-Branch Loans**

Every library system has a delivery system in place to move items from one location to another.

Library users receive requested items identified as available within another branch in the library system within 3 – 5 working days.

4.6.2 **Branch Exchanges**

- **Small Branches**: Branches serving from 1,000-5,000 population
  100% turn-over every 3 years
  Minimum quarterly branch exchanges: minimum 10% - 20% of collection exchanged on every exchange; Adult fiction requires more turnover than children's books.

- **Medium Branches**: Branches serving from 5,000-10,000 population
  Minimum quarterly branch exchanges: Since medium branches rely more on permanent collections and new permanent additions, branch exchanges consist of 10% of their collection each year.

- **Large Branches**: Branches serving from 10,000-35,000 population
  Limited number of exchanges except for specialized collections such as, large-print books and some audio-visual formats; Collection is based primarily on permanent acquisitions.

- **Urban Branches**: Large urban branches located within a Rural/Urban Library System serving catchment area populations of 35,000 or greater
  Limited number of exchanges; Collection is based primarily on permanent acquisitions.
4.7 Links with other Organizations and Individuals
(See Section 5.2 of the Ontario Public Library Guidelines)

The Ontario Public Library Guidelines state “The library has established partnerships with other organizations in the community, in order to coordinate the resources and efforts of each partner and thereby jointly improve service to the community (e.g. with schools, literacy program, chambers of commerce, heritage groups, government offices, public Internet access organizations and advocate groups.)”

For rural/urban library systems this also includes:
- Partnerships with appropriate post-secondary institutions in order to ensure support for postsecondary education opportunities within the rural/urban community;
- Co-operative activities or events with community agencies;
- Encouraging staff to participate in community organizations;
- Reciprocal borrowing agreements with neighbouring public library systems and with local post-secondary institutions.

4.8 Rural Development

The library system contributes to municipal strategic initiatives through a strategic plan which:
- Reflects the vision in the municipalities’ planning documents;
- Contains strategies that are complementary to those contained in the municipalities’ strategic plans.
- Has library performance and service indicators which are integrated into municipal planning and quality of life indicators.

4.9 Service Levels

4.9.1 Timeliness of delivery (Customer Service)
User requests for books are met:
- 50% in 7 days
- 70% in 15 days
- 85% in 30 days
- 65% of children and adults obtain the specific book that they want

4.9.2 Effectiveness
- The library system has a defined method for measuring effectiveness through regular analysis of relationship between the goals or objectives which have been set for a particular service or program and the results actually achieved: for example, a program is described as effective if it achieves the objectives which have been set for it.
- Cost-effectiveness is evaluated as cost per use and measured against other Rural/Urban library systems.

4.9.3 Efficiency
- The library system has clearly defined the relationship between inputs and outputs for a library activity. The main objective is to ensure the process is being carried out with the least amount of effort.

4.9.4 Holds
- The library has a system for reserving/holding items that are not currently available in the library.
- A library system re-orders the book when the number of holds reaches 10.
- Patrons have up to 30 holds at any given time.