



Canadian
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OVERDUE

The Case for Canada's Public Libraries

Why investment in public libraries is essential to Canada's post-pandemic recovery, competitiveness, and resilience



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The Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) is Canada's Urban Institute.

We are a national platform where policy makers, urban professionals, civic and business leaders, community activists and academics learn, share and collaborate with one another from coast to coast to coast. Our mission is to support vibrant, equitable, livable and resilient cities in Canada through research, engagement and storytelling.

This report builds on CUI's work toward the post-pandemic recovery of Canada's main streets and downtowns, and our belief in Canadians' collective ability to transform our cities into more inclusive, just and resilient places.

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Acknowledging the History of Canadian Urbanism

The Canadian Urban Institute acknowledges all the Indigenous Peoples of Canada and recognizes the ancestral territory of the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people from coast to coast to coast. We acknowledge our collective and individual responsibility to recognize historical patterns of exclusion and abuse, to build our understanding of Indigenous peoples and cultures, and to commit to the ongoing process of truth and reconciliation.

More specifically, CUI is continually challenged to look for ways to

- Return land to Indigenous peoples
- Implement the [94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)
- Implement the [46 articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples](#)
- Implement the [440 recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples](#)
- Investing in and supporting Indigenous communities and economies

Acknowledgement

The head office of the Canadian Urban Institute is located in Toronto, the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississauga's of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples from across Turtle Island. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississauga's of the Credit, and the Williams Treaty, signed with multiple Anishinaabe Nations. This place continues to be home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Further, CUI is cognizant that many urban planning practices reinforced racist and exclusionary practices of colonialism. The work of city-building today must include confronting the legacies of the past and search for new approaches that centre around equity and inclusion, making cities for and with everyone.

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THE PROVOCATION



“

The only thing you absolutely
have to know, is the location
of the library.

Albert Einstein
Physicist

Overdue: The Case for Canada's Public Libraries

is part of CUI's ongoing work to highlight the critical components of the urban and community fabric that are essential to Canada's social, economic and environmental resilience and post-pandemic recovery.

This provocation is the product of three years of CUI's engagement with Canada's urban public libraries through one of the most extraordinary periods in human history – the arrival and containment of the COVID-19 virus. The pandemic ravaged communities of all sizes around the world and left an indelible impact on our cities and communities of every political affiliation.

Canadian cities – from the large and rapidly-urbanizing to the small and rural – faced unprecedented challenges.


The tenacious, unpredictable, highly contagious virus threatened the capacity of individuals, families, neighbourhoods, businesses, government, and community service providers to function. Vulnerable populations faced the most pernicious challenges, as housing costs rose and availability declined, and social supports were severely constrained. As governments tried to communicate in real time, they were playing catch-up to the existing, emerging and anticipated challenges revealed by the virus. Over this sustained period, levels of public uncertainty and distrust in public institutions, the media, and governments escalated in every jurisdiction of the country.



We make the case that Canada's public libraries enable governments to meet their obligations and strengthen the common good.



With a vast physical and digital network across Canada, the time has come to recognize libraries as a national asset. Increased investment and strategically leveraging their potential are essential for renewing post-pandemic social cohesion, economic well-being and community resilience. Libraries are the one institution that provide a remarkably broad array of critical supports to our communities, including for knowledge distribution, culture, health, reconciliation, belonging, and our democracy.

A map of Canada is shown in a dark blue color. Numerous small, light blue dots are scattered across the map, representing the locations of library branches. The dots are most densely packed in the southern and eastern parts of the country, with some clusters in the western provinces and the Atlantic region. The text is overlaid on the map in four horizontal bars.

**Canada's libraries are an untapped
national network of social infrastructure
that includes 652 library systems
and 3350 branches.**



**Canada's libraries are visited
over 100 million times a year.**



Every month, 204,000 Canadians get job-seeking help at their public library.

Are you looking for work?

WITH
NT NEEDS


Are you looking to hire and need support?

Connecting employers and qualified job seekers

- Job posting services
- Wage incentives and apprenticeship signing bonuses
- Job fairs and recruitment
- Employer resources and

A woman with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, is leaning over a man who is seated at a computer workstation. The man is wearing a grey sweater and glasses. They are in a library setting with bookshelves filled with books in the background. Other people are visible at computer workstations in the foreground and background. The text "540 Canadian libraries provide free Wi-Fi and support." is overlaid on the image in a blue banner.

**540 Canadian libraries provide
free Wi-Fi and support.**



Over 300 libraries offer technology training classes, attended by nearly 16,000 people each month.



LIBRARIES FOR KNOWLEDGE

Libraries provide communities with in-person and remote access to print and digital resources, creating more equitable access to knowledge and services.

They continue to evolve, such as by creating different types of learning spaces, from traditional quiet reading rooms to areas for collaboration and the interactive, hands-on acquisition of new skills.

By improving literacy, libraries amplify the spillover effects: closing gaps in education, increasing the likelihood of employment and contributing to workforce development.

LIBRARIES FOR CULTURE

Libraries offer ideal spaces and opportunities to gather in person and online, enabling everyone to share and exchange ideas. They provide opportunities for visitors to access, and even create, culture: to read and listen to diverse authors, enjoy free films, music and dance, and craft new cultural content through interactive activities.

LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH

Libraries have become a key partner in our health care system, working closely with social workers, community organizations and governments. They create and advance better health outcome for everyone, providing programs and services that touch on essential indicators of the social determinants of health: early childhood development, literacy, employability, social inclusion and non-discrimination.



LIBRARIES FOR RECONCILIATION

Libraries have taken a leading role in responding to the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. They provide programming and collections that elevate Indigenous voices on cultures, languages, places, and knowledge, and address settler-centric structural biases in libraries and information retrieval systems.

LIBRARIES FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Libraries are catalysts for neighbourhood and downtown revitalization. From Vancouver to Kitchener to Halifax they've anchored plans to create stronger downtowns. In cities around the world, library services are being introduced into unusual locations like transit stations and grocery stores as well as informally, through casual "sharing" clubs among neighbours, and new platforms for exchange and mutual aid.

LIBRARIES FOR BELONGING

Libraries, by their nature and because they are located at the centre of communities, serve multiple needs in a way that no other public institution in Canada can. In a single day, a public library might be

- a place to access culture and information;
- a refuge from domestic violence;
- an election information or polling centre;
- a job search centre;
- a health clinic;
- a place to warm up or cool down;
- a language learning centre for newcomers;
- a place to attend free university classes or concerts; and
- a space for babies, children, caregivers and youth to make friends and form a community.

Libraries are catalysts for connection: the anchors that create stronger downtowns and connected neighbourhoods.

LIBRARIES FOR DEMOCRACY

Libraries embody the democratic principle that citizens can freely inform and educate themselves. They uphold freedom of expression and freedom to read, and provide access to a wide range of ideas and information that empower individuals to make informed decisions and fully participate in society. They combat polarization by being open and free to everyone, providing the most democratic of spaces in our cities. During elections, many libraries distribute voter information, host all-candidate meetings, and operate as polling stations.

By providing critical supports – knowledge, culture, health, reconciliation, belonging, and our democracy – Canada’s public libraries are quietly fulfilling core mandates at every level of government.



THE COVID PIVOT





During the COVID-19 pandemic, the one civic institution that emerged as a reliable, safe and essential service, was the public library. From coast to coast to coast, local libraries were able to pivot to serve their communities in a multitude of new ways.



In response to the crisis, libraries mobilized swiftly and decisively, demonstrating a deep understanding of community as they adapted their services to meet local needs.

Through their national network, libraries quickly built new standards of practice in response to the pandemic. And through their extensive local partnership networks, they “leaned in” to community in a variety of locally-relevant ways.



Some became foodbank distribution hubs, others distributed rapid test kits. Some made personal protective equipment for frontline healthcare workers with their 3D printers, or worked with community organizations to provide Chromebooks and Wi-Fi hotspots to shelters and group homes. Others helped students and seniors connect with others to support their mental health. They distributed social isolation activity kits to families to support their mental health, engagement and creativity when people hunkered down in the early, pre-vaccine days of the pandemic. Staff distributed snacks and menstrual products through their doorways, even when the library was closed, and supplied portable toilets adjacent to their buildings when public washrooms were in short supply. Chief Librarians across the country joined local emergency management teams and readily shared their community knowledge to inform broader community responses.



Barriers to service, like library fines, were removed; digital programming was ramped up; lending and distribution systems expanded to distribute laptops and COVID tests. With their rich network of partners, they already understood who would need the most help, and which partners to collaborate with as local needs shifted in response to the pandemic.

Over the decades, with the advent of technology, there was speculation about whether bricks-and-mortar public libraries would become obsolete. Instead, they have become indispensable to their communities, while retaining their traditional role as a place to go for information, to do research and study.



Quietly, Canada's public libraries have evolved into highly capable partners for every level of government, supporting the common good by serving critical mandates that fall under municipal, provincial and federal jurisdiction.

- Sustaining workforce development
- Reducing hate, racism, harm and violence
- Fostering cultural and artistic diversity
- Championing entrepreneurship and innovation
- Supporting newcomer settlement
- Advancing Reconciliation
- Talking action on climate change
- Providing a community access point for public services
- Fostering mental health
- Offering spaces for public consultations and disseminations of information
- Supporting access to place-based programming



THE POST-PANDEMIC CHALLENGE



Libraries are an underfunded asset that support governments in delivering on their obligations to individuals and their families, neighbourhoods, communities, and cities.



We are only now beginning to understand how profoundly pandemic-related lockdowns and social distancing protocols affected the health of our communities, and how critical libraries were in meeting community needs.



Pressure mounted, and continues to exist, for libraries to provide local services in the absence of adequate social infrastructure and comprehensive mental health care.

This includes dealing with:

- Disrupted school days and curricula: libraries provide children, youth, and post-secondary students with important opportunities for social interaction, as well as support for their schoolwork.
- Skyrocketing mental health challenges among youth: they provided support for young people.
- Seniors struggling with isolation: they provided a source of connection.
- At-risk and vulnerable individuals: they provided shelter, for companionship, and connections to services and opportunities.



Libraries find themselves as the triage centres on our main streets and downtowns.



They are called on in the absence of adequate social infrastructure and comprehensive mental health care. Increasingly, library workers must take security measures and call first responders to help a person in crisis. For example,

- A rash of violent incidents prompted Winnipeg's Millennium Library to introduce security checks of all patrons.
- The Edmonton Public Library hired staff to work with vulnerable populations and connect them to social services, after it had more than 6,000 interactions with at-risk individuals in just one year. This included almost 100 overdoses where naloxone had to be administered.

In the absence of critical systemic changes to how we deliver and fund mental health care and supportive housing, and address social vulnerability in Canada, libraries are struggling to handle the demands.

Greater demand and unmet social needs require greater support. Central to this problem is how libraries are funded in Canada.



Upwards of 90% of funding for Canadian urban libraries comes from municipal governments, although variations exist across provinces. The pandemic and its economic repercussions, as well as the increasing costs of climate change, have added new stresses to municipal budgets that were already under immense pressure.

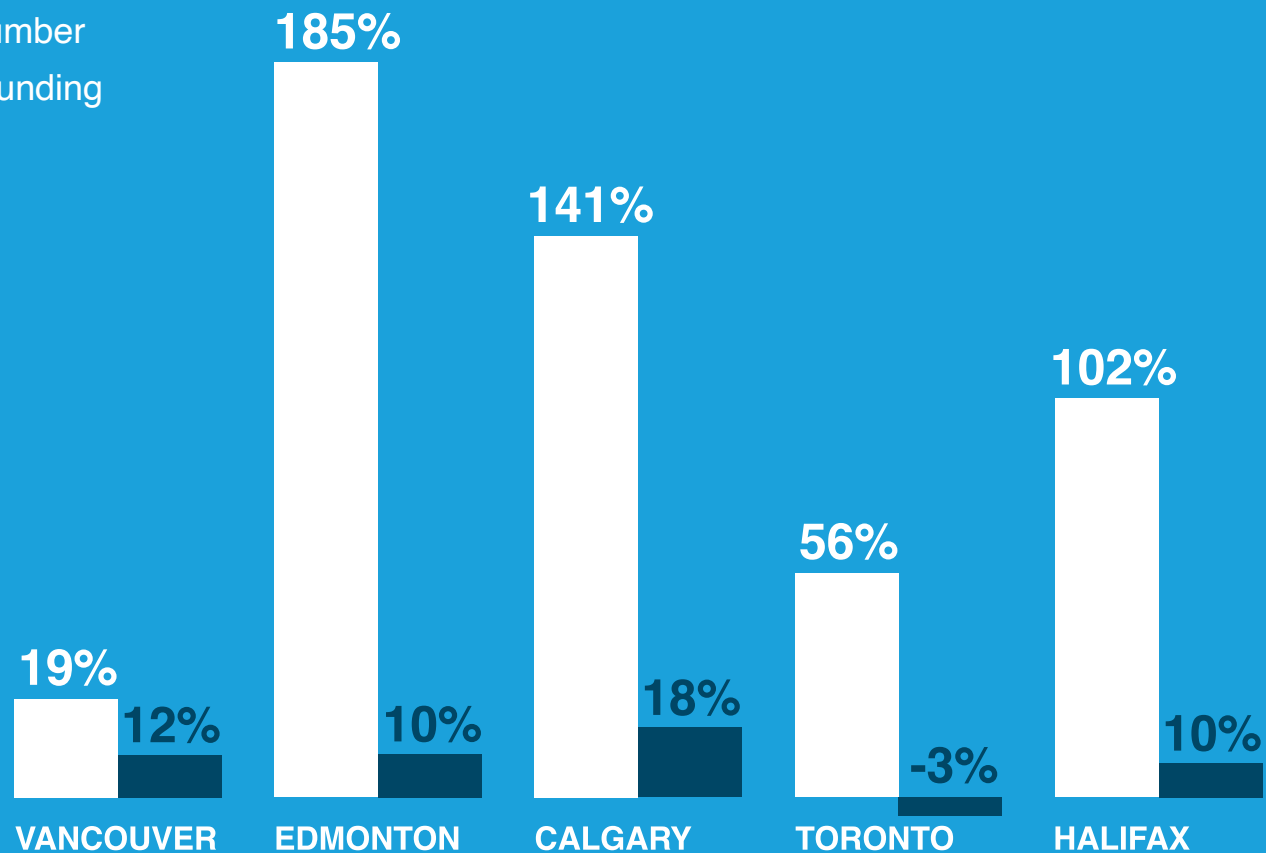
Libraries are funded from a tax base that does not increase proportionally with population or economic growth, and municipal support for libraries remains flat or fallen in real dollars over several years, despite the addition of many essential new programs and services. The more dire financial repercussions of the pandemic – and the growing mismatch between needed services and available revenue tools for Canada’s largest municipalities – has yet to be fully realized, but it puts libraries and the communities they serve at precarious and increasing risk.



The funding gap between the growing number of services being provided and the resources to do so is staggering and growing.

Percentage change in number of library programs and funding 2010-2019

DEMAND SUPPORT



The value proposition for increased investment is clear.



Research undertaken for this report ([Appendix](#)) estimates that an investment in library programming generates over six times more in economic and social benefits. **That is, for every \$1 invested in Canada's urban libraries, \$6 is generated in community economic impact, a return of over 600%.** In real terms, \$300 million in annual capital and operating funding generates \$2.1 billion in direct economic benefits. This number is significantly magnified when we take into account the social value of libraries in addressing literacy, educational outcomes, and workforce development; culture; mental and physical health; reconciliation; belonging; and the health of our democracy.

For example, a related finding by the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation shows that every \$1 invested in early childhood education yields six times the economic benefit. Currently, 45% of Canadians lack the literacy, numeracy, and digital skills that are increasingly necessary to succeed in jobs in the knowledge economy. Libraries have the potential to significantly impact Canada's literacy, numeracy and digital gap. A 1% increase in adult literacy could create an annual economic benefit of \$67 billion for Canada, the equivalent of approximately \$1,800 more in the pockets of each Canadian every year.

SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE





CUI developed two scenarios in partnership with Canada’s libraries. The first is a plausible “Stretched to the Brink” scenario where library funding continues to decline. The second is an aspirational scenario, where funding matches the enhanced role being played by urban libraries across the country, right now, every day.



A PLAUSIBLE
SCENARIO

Stretched to the Brink

A Dystopic Future of Under-Investment

Libraries are no longer able to provide “a space for everyone” as the visitor demographic shifts away from people of all ages and socio-economic status.

The Scenario

While libraries are busier than ever, due to growing demands for new programs and services (especially from newcomers and equity-seeking populations), municipal funding for all public services is declining proportionately to the rise in demand. Post-pandemic tax revenue is dramatically reduced as main street commercial businesses close and transit ridership diminishes. Provincial support remains static and line-item federal support is practically non-existent. Inflation is at its highest level in decades, putting strain on libraries and their visitors.

IMPACTS ON LIBRARIES

More severe funding cuts to core municipal services force libraries to reduce staffing levels, programs and hours of service.

The depth and breadth of both physical and digital collections is also reduced, causing fewer titles to be purchased and longer wait times. Social service programs also face budget cuts, and vulnerable populations experiencing homelessness and unemployment have fewer places to go. People take shelter in libraries, putting additional pressure on remaining staff to manage the increasing social disruption and violence that affects everyone’s sense of safety. Community members with greater financial resources stop visiting the local library as often.

The energy within libraries changes, as they no longer serve everyone. Communities become further polarized between the “haves” and “have-nots” as the divide between wealthy and poor grows. As community members have less exposure and interaction with one another, empathy and community care are less evident.



IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES

During the hours that libraries are now closed, there is a rise in criminal activity. Community members become increasingly hesitant to spend time downtown for fear of being victims of crime. Small businesses near the libraries see a decrease in foot traffic, threatening their viability. The municipality responds with increased policing, further diverting funds for library services.

The crisis continues to spiral. Vulnerable populations become even more present on main streets, in commercial lobbies, and any remaining public space like parks and community centres, fire stations, and faith places.

IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY MEMBERS

With reduced library hours and limited access to language learning, free conversation groups and places to spend time and meet others, a sense of belonging does not develop. Newcomers struggle to connect with the local community, and while some newcomers decide to leave Canada, others stay but experience greater loneliness. They express disappointment at not having made friends with people outside their own cultural community and feel the great opportunities they were promised have not materialized.

Those community members without access to the internet at home, and those with a low level of digital literacy who need support, turn to libraries for help. But now that the library is open for fewer hours and there are fewer

librarians and computers, and limited Wi-Fi, people cannot always get the online access to the services they need. They struggle to sign up for government services, enroll in programs, apply for jobs, and stay connected to friends.

With decreased social and cultural interaction, more Canadians experience a rise in xenophobia and discrimination. There is less trust among community members, which leads to less trust in government. Fewer people turn out to vote because it's more difficult to access polling stations, and they don't think it will make a difference anyway.

Schools observe that children are starting kindergarten with less exposure to early literacy and are less ready for learning.

Parents confide that they feel more isolated and overwhelmed by the new costs of educating and occupying their children through private programs. The gap in school performance between children of families who have financial means and those who do not is growing.

Political support for library investment also erodes, and more councillors question the need for libraries at all. Provincial legislation designed to protect libraries from political interference is questioned.

At the same time, deferred library maintenance costs continue to mount, making achieving a state of good repair seem impossible. Conditions worsen, and library spaces are less comfortable and more difficult to keep clean.



COPING

Facing the immediacy of burgeoning demands for social supports, some branches no longer provide programs for young families or after-school activities. As staff morale declines, recruiting and retention challenges and labour instability rise. The combination of staff shortages and smaller operating budgets has made it necessary for most library branches to reduce their hours of operation.

Some library systems begin to raise revenue by introducing fees for programs, computer use and even borrowing and admission. Local schools no longer rely on libraries to provide after-school access to computers and programs for youth, which has a direct impact on student outcomes.

As library systems reduce and narrow the scope of services they provide, they hold out hope that they can restore a better balance between providing the library services in their mandate and compensating for broken public and social service delivery systems. They want to see a more diverse constituency of visitors return over time – one that will also advocate for the necessary political support for reinvestment in libraries – but they realize this could take decades.



AN ASPIRATIONAL
SCENARIO

Resourced for Resilience
Strengthening the Common Good

Libraries are recognized for their vital role at the heart of their communities. Lessons from the pandemic underscore their importance and ability to pivot to meet diverse local needs.

The Scenario

While libraries are busy due to growing demands for new programs and services, (especially from newcomers and equity-seeking populations), municipal, provincial and federal funding for all public services is increasing with an eye on the long-term benefits. Inflation is at its highest level in decades, but the impact is cushioned by the programs and services available to everyone at local libraries.



IMPACTS ON LIBRARIES

Libraries across the country are thriving community centres. During the pandemic, they demonstrated their ability to go beyond traditional library services, providing essential information, functioning as vaccination clinics and service centres, and offering free 24-7 Wi-Fi, food, and public meeting spaces. As cities start to recover, libraries are now pivoting again to provide appropriate, well-funded and top-quality services and programs.

Libraries are welcoming places that are universally understood as essential to maintaining the health of communities, and promoting respect, tolerance and a sense of belonging for everyone. Also invaluable – and hard won – is the trust that community members overwhelmingly have in their

libraries to provide them with a broad range of information from many perspectives, and the tools to do their own research and explore their interests, with staff support.

Libraries are poised to fulfil crucial and varied needs, continuing to transform as they did in the decades prior to the pandemic. They are incentivized to innovate their sites and programs through a series of provincial and federal investment programs designed to improve outcomes according to Canada's 12 Social Determinants of Health. Governments acknowledge their critical role in ensuring equitable access to the internet by providing specific, core allocations to support broadband access for all Canadians.

Libraries pivot to become the essential community hub of every neighbourhood in Canada, working in partnership with service providers and key institutions. As the heart of their communities, they provide the primary public infrastructure, available seven days a week and free to everyone. Across the country, they reconfigure their services in unique ways that reflect the neighbourhood and populations they serve. Other critical services are drawn toward the library, and soon, supportive housing and health care providers, schools and transit services are located in close proximity.

Library leaders are recognized for their deep understanding of community and invited to participate in integrated regional planning

efforts that are linked to municipal, provincial and federal investment. They broker partnerships with provincial service providers, and connect with childcare centres, schools and post-secondary institutions to maximize the benefits of integrated service delivery and ensure high degrees of coordination for the public.

Library staff work closely and collaboratively with service providers from other public agencies, hosting a range of services on site or adjacent to library facilities, providing everything from newcomer settlement and passport services to tax clinics and employment workshops to cultural programming. Service coordination and cross-referrals become standard.



LIBRARY + EDUCATION



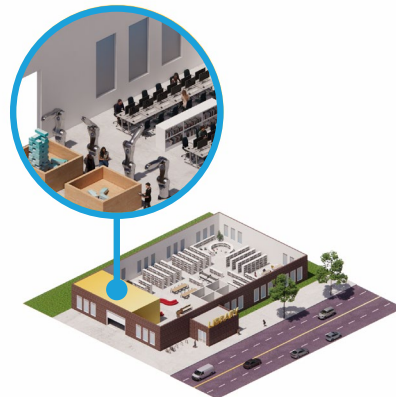
LIBRARY + OFFICE & RETAIL



LIBRARY + TRANSIT



LIBRARY + HOUSING



LIBRARY + MARKETPLACE



LIBRARY + RECREATION

IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES

These thriving partnerships also make possible a sharing of capital assets.

Canada's public libraries sit at the centre of a new service delivery model, one that integrates facilities, programs, services and resources across many different models of delivery.

In some cases, national agencies, including the CBC and Canada Post, relocate to local libraries. Capital costs for new libraries are now part of ongoing plans required by Infrastructure Canada, and they are built specifically to be climate resilient places of refuge, available to all community members during weather-related and other emergencies.

To maintain a state of good repair over the long-term, capital funding for existing libraries is now sourced through the Library Futures Fund, a low-return investment fund created by the federal Social Finance Fund. Government and public pension funds, private philanthropy, and private equity invest in library assets to achieve climate targets – guaranteeing a reasonable rate of return while improving energy performance and sustainability.

Canada's Infrastructure Bank creates a fund for social infrastructure investments, for which libraries are eligible. Library operating costs continue to be primarily covered by municipal budgets, but allocations are tied to inflation and population growth, so are not affected by annual budget reviews.

Auditor Generals from every order of government repeatedly cite libraries as having the highest return on investment of any publicly funded program.



IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the power of proximity. Consequently, governments invest in the core of every neighbourhood to provide services of all kinds, locally, that are easily accessed by everyone, and with minimal barriers. For community members with limited mobility – due to public health measures, severe weather, energy costs, age or a lack of transportation – there is easy, ready access to nearby services.

Recent investments and partnerships make libraries highly coveted workplaces for a broad range of trained professionals in technology, information management, design and the arts who are interested in collaborative, inter-disciplinary work environments.

Corporations, entrepreneurs and academic communities seek partnerships with libraries to create innovation and “maker” labs that bridge research and product development with on-the-ground community needs and emerging challenges.

Libraries function as testbeds to ensure youth get hands-on experience with different technologies, and career exposure. They are also indispensable in upskilling an aging workforce that is in constant demand to fill vacancies across all sectors.

Now, with sufficient funding and partnerships, many libraries across Canada are open 365 days a year, providing safe, engaging spaces at all times of day, regardless of historic calendar holidays. Known as the only truly inclusive space,

libraries house the broadest range of activities and visitors, with midnight youth events and dawn gatherings for astrology clubs.



With the shuttering of hundreds of faith institutions, libraries have become the sole community anchor along many main streets, able to provide spaces for community and civic activities, ranging from drop-in programs to drone repair workshops.

THRIVING

Libraries have become the widely acknowledged “go to” place for programs and services that support community cohesion and resilience, connecting and equipping residents to survive and thrive as Canada adapts to a fast-changing economy, social conditions and climate change.

“

Bad libraries build collections,
good libraries build services,
great libraries build communities.

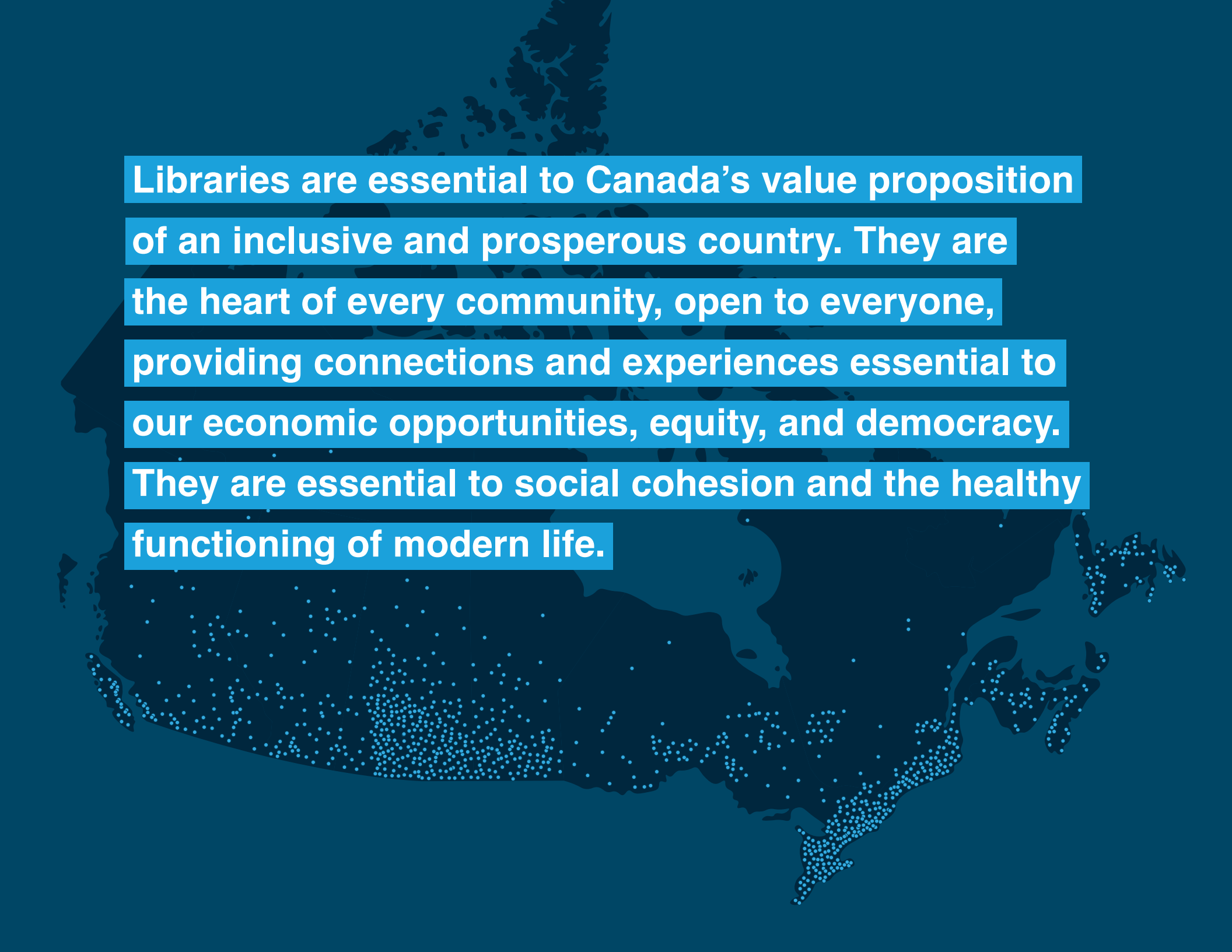
R. David Lankes



**THE
WAY
FORWARD**

MOUNT PLEASANT VILLAGE COMMUNITY CENTRE AND LIBRARY





Libraries are essential to Canada's value proposition of an inclusive and prosperous country. They are the heart of every community, open to everyone, providing connections and experiences essential to our economic opportunities, equity, and democracy. They are essential to social cohesion and the healthy functioning of modern life.

The Way Forward A Call To Action

The following is a Call to Action, outlining the priorities, goals and steps toward building the resilience of Canada's neighbourhoods and communities by strategically leveraging a hidden asset – the public library. This effort requires equipping the country's largest network of knowledge and service providers with the tools and resources they need to meet the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges of this post-pandemic century. These actions hinge on increased recognition and funding by provincial and federal governments: that urban libraries can – and do – serve critical mandates that are under government jurisdiction.

The Way Forward Priorities

1. **Relieve Current Operational Pressures**

to ensure libraries remain safe, accessible, and welcoming libraries to everyone.



2. **Establish Libraries as Critical Infrastructure**

where community resilience is strengthened through funding of libraries to deliver government priorities.



3. **Formalize Sustainable Investment Streams**

that recognize their expanding role.



Priority 1

Relieve Current Operational Pressures



Today, libraries across the country are stretched beyond capacity, and some have essentially been turned into crisis centres as the last safe haven for vulnerable populations. While Canada’s urban libraries are intentionally accessible and welcoming spaces for all residents – including those at risk – they are not the appropriate public space to address the serious mental health and addiction issues being experienced across the country.

GOALS

- Reduce the frequency and severity of social disorder and violence
- Established, appropriate crisis response approaches
- Reinforcement of the role of libraries as accessible community hubs that can refer visitors through referral networks
- Restoration of the perception and reality of libraries as welcoming places for everyone

OUTCOME

Safe, accessible and welcoming libraries for everyone

Priority 1

Relieve Current Operational Pressures



MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL ACTIONS

- Confirm deferred maintenance/costs to maintain state of good repair for library systems
- Review the municipal Strategic Plan and prioritize alignment with library services
- Engage libraries early and often in municipal planning and neighbourhood development
- Hear from library CEOs (or their designates) on the impacts of homelessness and treatment of mental health and addictions, to enhance understanding
- Prioritize libraries and their adjacent neighbourhoods as priority areas for coordinated services and investment in mental health, addiction and public safety

- Work with library systems to improve community emergency preparedness, including as places of refuge in response to climate events

PROVINCIAL & FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Develop a pan-Canadian strategy on mental health and addiction that would include public library leadership
- Develop rapid response strategies including libraries as referral centres
- Increase provincial funding for (1) integrated community-based mental health and addiction services for people with complex needs, to reduce vulnerability, and (2) support libraries in being able to refer individuals in need

Priority 2

Establish Libraries as Critical Infrastructure



Governments must recognize the intrinsic role of libraries as community infrastructure, as critical as transportation, sanitation, emergency responders and hospitals. Further, provincial and federal governments must invest in the vast network of libraries to reach Canadians from coast to coast to coast, in order to achieve their most important mandates: addressing climate change, Indigenous reconciliation, affordability, and digital equity.

GOALS

- Strengthened community resilience and disaster preparedness by equipping libraries
- Reinforcement of democratic principles of access to information, Indigenous reconciliation, inclusion and citizenship through libraries
- Funded services and programs in libraries to support municipal, provincial and federal priorities

OUTCOME

Community resilience is strengthened through funding of libraries to be able to work with community partners to deliver on municipal, provincial and federal priorities

Priority 2

Establish Libraries as Critical Infrastructure



MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL ACTIONS

- Review municipal Strategic Plans and identify priorities for alignment with library services
- Integrate libraries into planning across municipal department divisions, services and workplans, as knowledge hubs and program delivery centres
- Centre redevelopment and new developments around libraries, with proximity to other public services, affordable housing and community facilities

PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Establish a National Task Force on the Future of Public Libraries to:

- Undertake a comprehensive national assessment of the value and impact of public libraries on community well-being and health
- Aggregate data on the state of library buildings to create a long-term investment plan for renovations and construction of new libraries, including in multi-use facilities
- Contribute to the program development of Canada's Long-Term Funding Plan for libraries, acknowledging the library's role in supporting broadband access through the network of libraries
- Identify whole-of-government leveraging opportunities for strategic partnerships among federal agencies and libraries for local service delivery

Priority 3

Formalize Sustainable Investment Streams



Despite the essential role public libraries play in addressing government priorities, they remain chronically underfunded. Today's reliance on municipal funding is not sufficient to meet the growing expectation of libraries to serve their communities in multiple ways. Libraries need to be invested in as Canada's most trusted institution.

GOAL

→ Formalized funding that recognizes libraries' expanding roles and resources them through a sustainable, blended funding pool, with contributions from municipal, provincial and federal governments.

OUTCOME

Stable and diversified revenue for libraries

Priority 3

Formalize Sustainable Investment Streams



MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL ACTIONS

- Create accountability mechanisms, such as benchmarking, to ensure local library funding keeps pace with inflation and is not annually at risk
- Equip municipal leaders with advocacy tools to increase provincial and federal support

PROVINCIAL & FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Look for mechanisms to commit provincial core funding for library operations, acknowledging the role libraries play in delivering on provincial priorities
- Explore the potential for a per capita funding allocation that supports libraries as deliverers of federal priorities, as part of the next iteration of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program/ Long-Term Infrastructure Plan.

OVERDUE

The test of COVID-19 made crystal clear the importance of community members having reliable, safe and accessible places close to home, to gather information and find support. There's no predicting our next collective challenge, only the knowledge that there will be one. It's incumbent on all of us, as urban stewards building one of the most urbanized countries in the world, to address the challenges and seize every opportunity to strengthen one of our most valuable civic assets: our public libraries.

Canada's workforce will increasingly be challenged by an aging population, requiring better supports for Canadians wishing to work longer and needing to upgrade skills to remain competitive.

Concurrently, higher levels of immigration will welcome 500,000 immigrants annually by 2025. Newcomers rely on public libraries for services such as language training, job search assistance, access to computers, and to establish connections essential to settlement. Early literacy programs and language classes offered in libraries will be key to providing the children of new immigrants with a successful start to their education in Canada.

With an increasing reliance on technology, all Canadians need to have digital access and support in navigating the information they find. Artificial intelligence, detecting disinformation and new technological interfaces can all be better understood with the assistance of a librarian and library programs.

Canada will need to support lifelong learners and entrepreneurs to keep pace with technology and adapt to a fast-changing economy and labour market.

Communities will see increased shocks and stresses stemming from climate change, technological disruptions and global political and social upheaval. Equitable access to free public libraries where all community members are welcome is essential to social cohesion and our democracy.



Business magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie invented the free public library by providing funding for more than 2,500 public libraries in many parts of the world, including 125 in Canadian communities, between 1883 and 1929. What began as private philanthropy has become an essential public service.

Post-pandemic, we have this moment for a once-in-a-generation shift in how we secure the social, economic and environmental future of Canadian communities and cities. We are overdue for this change – one that recognizes that investment in this national asset can renew social cohesion, contribute to economic growth, and support community resilience for the future.

Appendix

Canadian Urban Libraries Council member program and activity surveys and the assessment of their economic impact was conducted by statistician Kevin Stolarick, PhD. Kevin is the Dean of the Curtner Leadership Program at Urban Land Institute and a Consulting Researcher for the Toronto Workforce Innovation Group. His research focuses on the relationship between firm performance and information technology; and the impacts of technology, tolerance, talent, and quality of place on regional growth and prosperity. His work provides informative and accessible insights into the Creative Economy and the role of the Creative Class in increasing regional growth and prosperity.

Survey of CULC Library Systems

Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) membership consists of 49 library systems across Canada's largest urban areas. Due to the number of requests that CULC already makes of its membership and to encourage completions, a survey was prepared to maximize the amount of necessary information obtained while minimizing the amount of time required to complete it. The primary goal of the survey was to collect information on what programs and services each of the library systems is currently offering. Annual reports, websites and other sources were obtained and reviewed to identify offered programs and services. Those were then manually clustered around 10 themes/topics.

The themes/topics identified were:

- Physical Lending/Access
- Digital Lending
- Bookable Space/Facilities
- Kids and Family Programs
- Teen Programs
- Older Adults Programs
- Newcomer Programs
- General Audience Programs
- On Site Social/Support Services
 - Community Outreach
- Retail/Office Co-Location

Five to fifteen specific programs and services were identified for each theme.

Additionally, the survey requested information about when each of the various demographic groups returned to the library, any additional programs/services for each theme, other community partnerships, COVID-19 recovery priorities, and contact information for follow up questions.

In total, the survey identified 88 programs and services. The approach taken was to identify which of the 88 identified programs and services were being offered by each library system, and then to follow up and ask for detailed cost, benefit, and number served (e.g. program participants, books lent), information from 2022. In effect, by knowing who does what and the costs and benefits for a specific library for each of the programs/services, the overall impact could be (roughly) estimated without requiring many hours of data collection and reporting for each system.

The survey was launched on November 14, 2022. Results were accepted through December 18, 2022. Forty of the 49 CULC members submitted responses. This should be interpreted as a 100% response rate from participating library systems, as the remaining members are not library systems or are not community focused (e.g., Library and Archives Canada and Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec).

The 88 programs and services were distributed in twos and threes across the 40 respondents, with each assigned the programs/services that they reported doing. Generally, a library was asked about programs/services within the same theme to keep the data collection and reporting less streamlined. Detailed responses were obtained from 28 of the 40. For 62 of the 88 programs/services.

On average, about half of the library systems reported doing the activities for which additional information was not collected. As a result, the economic impacts estimated here understate the actual total, combined impact. The unreported programs and services are generally specific in nature, so their absence is not expected to result in a major underreporting of total impact, but the “real” number would be higher if these were included.

Advancing Social and Economic Well Being

COVID 19 Priorities

In addition to the questions on two questions on COVID-19 recovery were repeated and a series of questions on when specific groups returned to the library were asked.

Table A1. Pandemic recovery priorities

| What are the most important roles of public libraries to help our communities recover? Identify and prioritize your top 3 | Total | Share (%) | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|-------|-----------|----|----|----|
| Helping community members be informed and connected | 34 | 85% | 18 | 8 | 8 |
| Building cohesion in community | 26 | 65% | 10 | 6 | 10 |
| Supporting community members suffering from social isolation | 23 | 58% | 3 | 12 | 8 |
| Connecting people to government support and services | 18 | 45% | 3 | 8 | 7 |
| Helping low-income families and groups to return to normal | 13 | 33% | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| Supporting job seekers | 8 | 20% | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs to restart the economy | 4 | 10% | 3 | 0 | 1 |

The first question asked respondents to select their top most important 3 roles of the library for pandemic recovery” (see Table A1). Each of the options was selected as a top priority by at least 3 library systems. And while almost all the libraries (34 of 40) selected “Helping community members be informed and connected” their top 3, there was not uniform agreement on the most important roles. These results are consistent with the argument that individual library systems have customized their priorities and offerings to best

meet the needs of their specific communities. The second question asked respondents to identify their priority population (Table A2). Every available option was selected by at least two library systems. While over 80% (33 out of 40) selected “children and family” or “vulnerable populations”, evenly split between two. The results also show libraries prioritizing programs/services based on the community’s needs and the library’s capabilities.

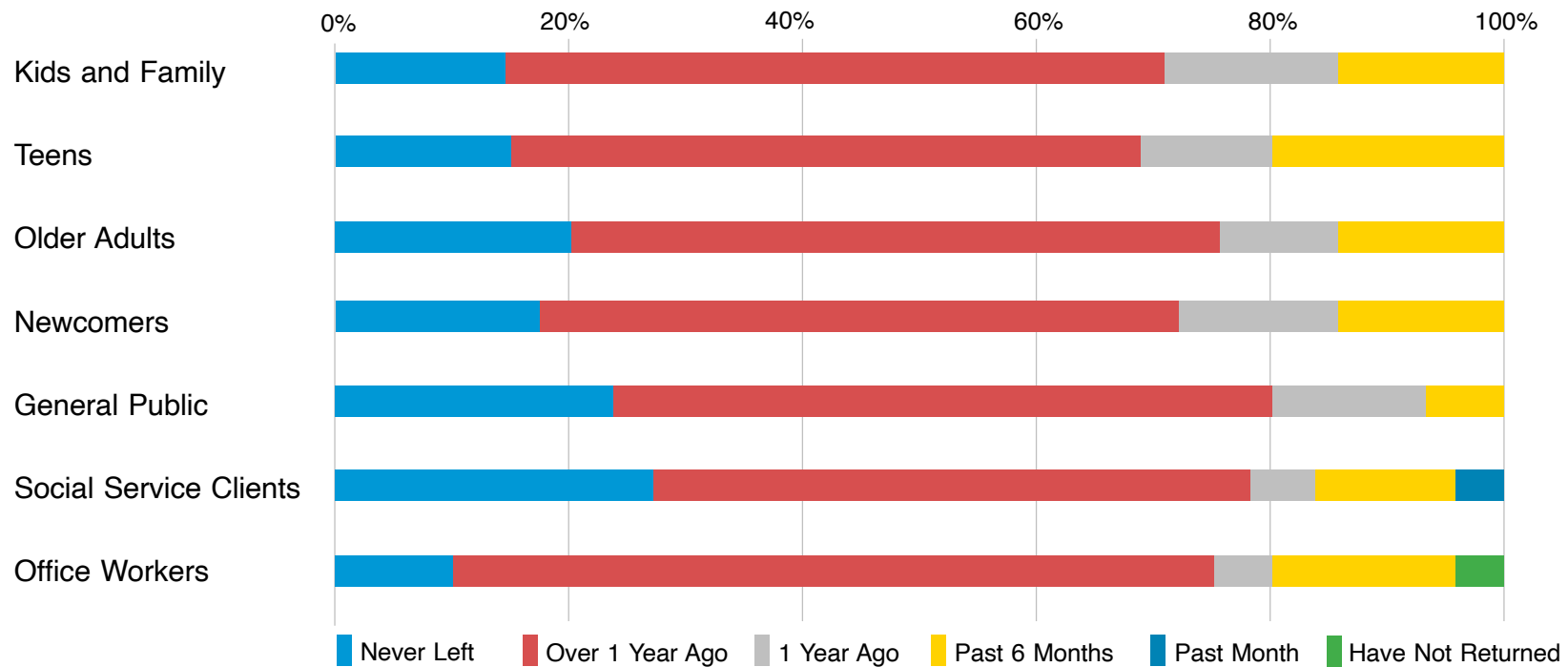
Table A2. Return of specific populations

| During recovery, the population that is most important for my library to focus on is: (select one) | | |
|---|----|-------|
| Children and Family | 17 | 42.5% |
| Vulnerable Populations | 16 | 40.0% |
| Seniors | 3 | 7.5% |
| Newcomers | 2 | 5.0% |
| Youth | 2 | 5.0% |

Figure 1A shows the when specific groups of clients returned to the library. For all libraries, for almost every client group, they either never left or have returned within the past 6 months. Generally, most library systems saw most client groups return. Around 15% of libraries had at least one client group that

never left and about 10% had one or more groups return within the past 6 months (second half of 2022). The nonuniformity and range of these results again demonstrate that the Covid-19 experience and response varied from system to system.

Figure A1. When clients returned to the library



Who Is Doing What?

Findings: Programs and Services

Table 3 lists the 88 programs/services and the count and share of respondents who reported undertaking that activity. Several activities are being provided by all libraries, and each unique activity is being provided by at least two library systems.

Table 3. Programs and services by use

| Theme/Topic: Program/Service | # of Respondents | Share % |
|---|------------------|---------|
| Digital Lending: eBooks | 40 | 100 |
| Digital Lending: Digital audiobooks | 40 | 100 |
| Digital Lending: Digital newspapers | 40 | 100 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Books | 39 | 98 |
| Physical Lending/Access: DVDs | 39 | 98 |
| Digital Lending: Digital magazines | 39 | 98 |
| Kids and Family Programs: Storytime | 39 | 98 |
| Kids and Family Programs: Dedicated kids and family spaces in the library | 39 | 98 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Music | 38 | 95 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Public Wi-Fi | 38 | 95 |
| General Audience Programs: Computer and technology training | 38 | 95 |
| General Audience Programs: Author talks, lectures and panels | 38 | 95 |

| | | |
|---|----|----|
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Meeting rooms | 37 | 93 |
| General Audience Programs: Book clubs and reading circles | 37 | 93 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: Partner with local community organizations to develop community resources | 37 | 93 |
| Digital Lending: Streaming video | 36 | 90 |
| Kids and Family Programs: Reading and/or writing support programs | 36 | 90 |
| Kids and Family Programs: Kids book clubs / reading buddies | 36 | 90 |
| Older Adults Programs: Digital life skills for seniors | 36 | 90 |
| Digital Lending: Streaming music | 35 | 88 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Study rooms | 34 | 85 |
| Teen Programs: Multi-media production, robotics, or other tech-related workshops | 34 | 85 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Computers (includes Chromebooks) | 33 | 83 |
| General Audience Programs: Programs on Truth and Reconciliation | 33 | 83 |
| Digital Lending: Digital comics | 32 | 80 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Community multipurpose rooms | 32 | 80 |
| General Audience Programs: Business and employment (e.g. interview skills, work culture training, job search) | 32 | 80 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: Areas for warming or cooling during extreme weather | 32 | 80 |
| Newcomer Programs: Language learning programs | 31 | 78 |
| General Audience Programs: Posting of civic information (e.g. election information, city hall services, etc.) | 30 | 75 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: Partner with health agency to provide information and services | 30 | 75 |
| General Audience Programs: Tour of the library | 29 | 73 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Multi-media lab | 28 | 70 |

| | | |
|---|----|----|
| Teen Programs: Arts classes or workshops | 28 | 70 |
| Older Adults Programs: Lectures and panels on positive mental health and brain health | 28 | 70 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Community centres | 28 | 70 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Conference rooms | 26 | 65 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Larger Event Space for more than 50 people | 26 | 65 |
| Teen Programs: Reading and/or writing workshops | 26 | 65 |
| Older Adults Programs: Personal financial planning | 26 | 65 |
| Newcomer Programs: Library Services in multiple languages | 26 | 65 |
| Newcomer Programs: Job search support and skills program | 26 | 65 |
| Newcomer Programs: Online resources for newcomer services | 26 | 65 |
| General Audience Programs: Digital creation (e.g. animation, self-publishing, etc.) | 26 | 65 |
| Teen Programs: Teens Book Club | 25 | 63 |
| Older Adults Programs: Senior social events | 25 | 63 |
| General Audience Programs: Performance art events | 24 | 60 |
| Teen Programs: Game Nights for teens | 23 | 58 |
| Newcomer Programs: Access to settlement workers | 23 | 58 |
| General Audience Programs: Film Screening | 23 | 58 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Tablets (iPad) | 22 | 55 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Passes to cultural organizations (such as museums) | 21 | 53 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Exhibition Space | 21 | 53 |
| General Audience Programs: Oral history and stories | 21 | 53 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Passes to national parks | 19 | 48 |
| Newcomer Programs: Citizenship practice test or preparation courses | 19 | 48 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Musical Instruments | 18 | 45 |

| | | |
|---|----|----|
| Teen Programs: Support for college application, financial aid or other career readiness programs | 18 | 45 |
| Older Adults Programs: Support to access options to age in place | 18 | 45 |
| Older Adults Programs: Creative aging programs | 18 | 45 |
| General Audience Programs: Literacy Van, Bookmobile or Books to Go | 18 | 45 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Theatre | 17 | 43 |
| Older Adults Programs: Telephone seniors who might be socially isolated | 16 | 40 |
| Newcomer Programs: Personal financial planning | 15 | 38 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Café | 15 | 38 |
| Bookable Space/Facilities: Outdoor space | 14 | 35 |
| Kids and Family Programs: Nature walks | 14 | 35 |
| Newcomer Programs: Newsletter or centralized information for newcomers | 14 | 35 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: On-staff “community services navigator” to help people understand and navigate the system to access need social, justice and/or health services | 14 | 35 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: Partner with local partners and organizations to provide food for those in need | 14 | 35 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Municipal government office | 14 | 35 |
| Older Adults Programs: Support to navigate change with aging | 13 | 33 |
| Teen Programs: Mindfulness workshops | 12 | 30 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: On-staff social workers | 11 | 28 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Gallery | 11 | 28 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Gym | 11 | 28 |
| Physical Lending/Access: Tools | 8 | 20 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Library store / Boutique | 7 | 18 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: Community fridge | 6 | 15 |

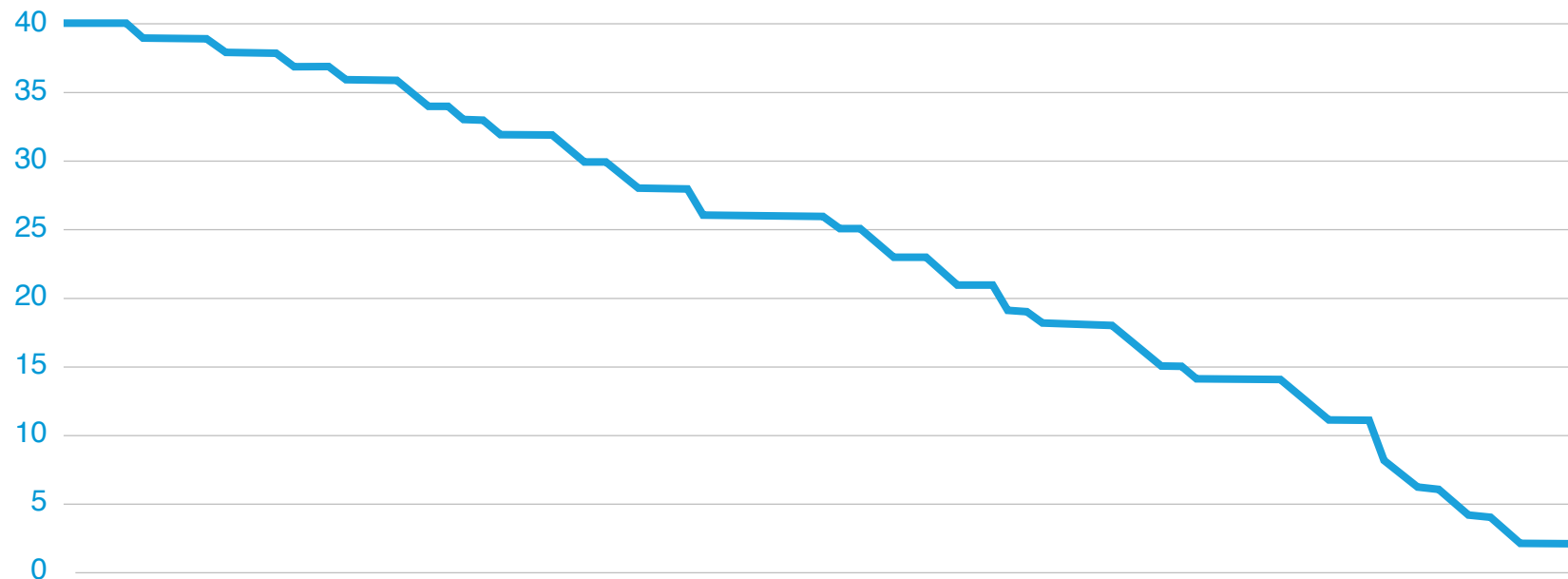
| | | |
|---|---|----|
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Housing | 6 | 15 |
| Teen Programs: Counselling | 5 | 13 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Museum | 4 | 10 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Provincial government office | 4 | 10 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: College/University office | 3 | 8 |
| On Site Social/Support Services – Community Outreach: Shower facilities | 2 | 5 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Movie Theatre | 2 | 5 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: CBC | 2 | 5 |
| Retail/Office Co-Location: Federal government office | 2 | 5 |

How Many Are Doing What?

Figure A2 shows the number of library systems offering each of the 88 programs/services. While there are a few offerings provided by some libraries and every offering by at least two library systems, some offerings are available at most libraries and some are only available at a few libraries. The results span the full range. Canadian urban libraries

are not monolithic in their offerings. The mix of programs and services offered by each varies. While some consistencies are seen, and expected, inconsistencies are also present. This result reflects that individual library systems are uniquely responding to their specific communities' needs and the library system's own resources and capabilities.

Figure A2. How many are doing what



Estimated Economic Impact of Canadian Urban Libraries

Methodology and Findings

The following process was used to estimate the overall economic impact of Canada's urban library systems. The impact is measured as the excess benefits created relative to the cost of providing and administering a program or service. It is based on the number of people attending the program or using the service (borrowing a book) and their individual benefit.

Step 1

Ten physical and digital lending services are separated out for special processing so that separate estimates could be developed based on the 2021 Census population for the Census Area served by each library system.

- Physical Lending/Access: Books
- Physical Lending/Access: DVDs
- Physical Lending/Access: Music
- Physical Lending/Access: Public Wi-Fi
- Digital Lending: Digital comics
- Digital Lending: Digital magazines
- Digital Lending: Digital newspapers
- Digital Lending: eBooks
- Digital Lending: Streaming music
- Digital Lending: Streaming video

Step 2

Of the remaining 78 programs and services, detailed cost/benefit information was received for 52:

- Population served (and number)
- Cost
- Number of participants
- Tangible (\$) benefit per participant
- Intangible (non-monetary) benefits

Step 3

For the 52 programs/services with detailed cost/benefit information, the number of library services offering program/service was counted.

Step 4

An estimate of the total Canada-wide costs, participants, and benefits is calculated. This assumes that the reported numbers would be equally applicable to all other libraries that are

offering a similar program/service.

By spreading the request for detailed information across all libraries and removing those items that are clearly influenced by underlying population (#1), the estimate is not biased in any way, and the tremendous nationwide effort that would be required to estimate every program/service for every library system is avoided. It creates a very rough estimate but the actual variation should be “white noise” with some total impacts over-estimated and an equal number under-estimated. This is the best that could be done within the timeframe and resources available.

As an example, a library system reported that for “Teen Programs: Game Nights for Teens” in 2022:

- It cost them \$3,000 to provision for and administer the program, which includes board and electronic games
- 341 individuals participated during the year in sessions

- It provided this for free, purchased and providing games, and prizes
 - The average benefit was \$25 per person based on the usual average cost to participate in something similar organized through MeetUp or other for-profit venues would have a minimum purchase requirement.
 - In 2022, the total benefit to the community for hosting teen games nights was \$8,525.
 - The net benefit was \$5,525.
 - 23 library systems reported that they provide “Games Nights for Teens”
 - Therefore, the total economic benefit provided across Canada by the librarians that provide “Game Nights for Teens” is \$127,075.
 - If all 49 CULC members provided this program (discussed more in the next section), the total benefit would be \$270,725.
- The thoughtful response from the library also included this response to the prompt about intangible benefits also arise from providing this program: Engaging in games helps teens in problem solving skills, better social skills when gaming in a group. Games can improve manual dexterity and stimulate imaginative play and creativity. Gaming is also a great way to improve literacy skills as games tell stories in new and exciting ways. The library provides opportunities for teens to engage with games in a safe and welcoming environment.”

Step 5

Returning to #1 (physical and digital lending) and separately developing estimates that take into account regional population,

- Ten different libraries were asked to provide cost, number served and benefits for each of the ten lending options. The 2021 Census population numbers (for the CMA or CA that includes the library system) were then used to normalize the costs, service provided and benefits per person.

- The per person estimates then combined with Census 2021 population estimates for each of the 40 library systems included in this study.
- Accumulating each library for each of the ten physical and digital lending opportunities result in an estimated Canada-wide economic impact from lending activities.

Table A4 is the result of combining all of this information.

Table A4. Total economic impact of Canada’s urban libraries

| Total Economic Impact from Canada’s Urban Libraries | Cost (\$m) | Served # | Total Benefit (\$m) | Net Benefit (\$m) |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Programs/Services (52) | 205,398,323 | 55,289,329 | 627,525,391 | 422,127,068 |
| Physical/Digital Lending (10) | 101,004,045 | 260,296,271 | 1,502,546,053 | 1,401,542,008 |
| Total | 306,402,368 | 315,585,600 | 2,130,071,444 | 1,823,669,076 |

Overall, Canada's urban libraries are creating \$2.1 billion in community economic impact on just over \$300 million in cost. The overall return is nearly \$6 for every \$1 spent. Much of this is driven by providing free access to physically or digitally published goods, but the other programs and services return on average more than \$2 for every \$1 spent. Based on the 2021 Canada wide Census population of 36,991,981, every man, women and child in Canada is partaking in a library offering 8.5 times per year on average.

The impact of Canada's urban libraries is not limited to the \$1.8 billion in economic effects, but that is the tractable and measurable scope of this study.

What If...?

As explained in the prior section, the estimated economic effect of Canada’s urban libraries is based solely on the activities that each of the 40 library systems reported they were providing at the time of the survey. What if all 40 libraries were doing all 62 things?

Table A5 below shows the estimates if all 40 libraries were each providing all 52 of the programs/services (52 of the 88 for which detailed numbers were reported). It shows the increase in cost and the resulting increase in benefits. The physical/digital lending numbers are unchanged as all 40 library systems are

already providing those programs/services. The overall changes are not tremendous mostly as a result of the smaller number of individuals reached by many of the specific programs/services. The new mix of programs drops the overall return to \$4.50 for each \$1 spent, which is a reflection of library systems not offering programs for which they have determined that the benefits do not outweigh the costs. In effect, this analysis forces every library to offer every program, resulting in slightly less effective overall returns, but shows at least some of the untapped potential in Canada’s urban libraries.

Table A5. Potential economic impact of Canada’s urban libraries

| | Cost | Number Served | Total Benefit | Net Benefit |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Programs/Services (52) | 368,613,326 | 97,859,174 | 1,117,590,285 | 748,976,959 |
| Physical/Digital Lending (10) | 101,004,045 | 260,296,271 | 1,502,546,053 | 1,401,542,008 |
| Total | 469,617,371 | 358,155,445 | 2,620,136,338 | 2,150,518,967 |

Resources

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