

## **Funding Review Summary**

From: Erin Comeau, Executive Director

To: Municipalities and Towns in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth

Date: July 10, 2025

### **Library Funding Formula (expired March 31, 2025)**

Regional libraries in Nova Scotia are funded by operating grants from the Nova Scotia Government (Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage) and municipal governments. In the 8 rural regions (non-HRM), the split is 71% Provincial, 26% Municipal, and 3% Library Board. The amount each pays, and the total dollar amount, is determined by the provincial government in a 5-year Funding Formula. The last formula for April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2025 has expired. The expired formula did not include any annual increases from 2020 to 2025 for inflation or other service cost increases. The 2020 increase was the first increase to funding since 2009. Since then, one-time relief grants have been provided in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Western Counties Regional Library's base budget under the current formula is \$1,860,000.

### **Library Funding Formula Review and Report**

In 2024 the province formed a new Library Funding Review Committee to bring forward recommendations for an updated formula. The Committee was comprised of representatives from across the province including government officials (Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH) and Municipal Affairs), Library Board members, Municipal Councillors, Municipal CAO's, and Regional Library CEOs. Research was carried out in the top priority areas of staff salaries, collections, and technology. An independent consulting firm was hired to carry out a comparison between the job duties, education, skills and salaries of Nova Scotia library employees to those in government and other libraries across Nova Scotia and Canada.

The Library Funding Review Committee reported their recommendations to government in September 2024. Several options were provided but all included increases in salaries, collections, and technology. The Committee also warned of the effects of "no increase" or "status quo" in funding and how it would severely impact libraries across the province.

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### **Provincial Budget 2025-26**

There was no increase in the 2025/26 provincial budget for public libraries. We are unsure of the future of the Funding Formula recommendations. While disappointed, we are hopeful there will be a resolution that recognizes the important role libraries play in communities and we are continuing the discussion with government.

### **WCRL Challenges**

- The Bank of Canada calculates that inflation has increased 43% from 2009 to 2025. During that time, WCRL funding has only increased 21%; a dollar amount of \$376,100.
- Wages are low and labour force changes mean that the current staffing and salaries model is unsustainable. WCRL is having significant difficulty in finding and retaining qualified staff, especially at the library branch level where full-time hours are not feasible.
- Roughly 40% of the staff has turned over since 2021; low wages and part-time hours are contributing to lack of retention.
- Amidst the financial and labour challenges, there are continued calls for elevated services, larger collections in more formats including accessible formats, more diversified programs, and additional skills and duties for staff (especially in the areas of technology and helping vulnerable people).

### **Service Impacts**

To date, WCRL has had to eliminate full-time and part-time positions to stabilize budgets. The reduction in positions has meant reductions in:

- library service hours in all branches
- outreach services including services to schools
- valuable community and government partnership programs

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### Facts About WCRL Usage

- 10 locations in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth Counties provide 275 weekly open hours.
- Between 2009 and 2024, WCRL circulation has remained steady even with a population decrease of roughly 8% during that same time. This number doesn't include other measures of use like programs, technology, or use as a community space.
- In 2023-24, 1 in 5 tri-county residents was a library card holder. We welcome new members to the library every week.
- Municipalities are investing in libraries: 5 out of 10 branches have renovated or rebuilt since 2000.
- Connectivity through computers and Wi-Fi is a priority in rural areas: over 58,000 Wi-Fi connections in 2023-24, which is a 20% increase in usage over four years.

### Community Use of Libraries

Libraries are places where people go because they hope to improve their lives. Public libraries are welcoming, accessible spaces that bring people together and are important partners in supporting key determinants of health – making sure everyone has access to reliable and accurate information. Staff can help people navigate questions they have, find entertainment, participate in lifelong learning opportunities, develop literacy skills and access safe places to be. They provide physical public spaces for community engagement and connections. These are much needed in rural areas where opportunities for people to gather, socialize and learn from each other are limited.

### Broader Public Library Impacts

- Average ROI of public libraries is 6:1.<sup>1</sup>
- A 1% increase in adult literacy rates could be worth \$67 billion in economic output for Canada.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Urban Institute, "Overdue: The Case for Canada's Public Libraries" (2023)

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- Social Impact of Libraries – in 2023 Toronto PL was able to measure emotional, intellectual, creative and social impact; showing that the library creates a strong sense of wellbeing and focus for users; provides a vital and dynamic learning environment for personal and professional growth; helps people gain new skills and acts as a catalyst for inspiration; and provides a welcoming and inclusive environment that fosters connections and helps build community.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Seismonaut for Toronto Public Library, "Enabling Torontonians to grow and thrive: the social impact of public libraries" (2023)