

Current Service Delivery

YRL delivers comprehensive services across 54 municipalities and three school divisions, serving approximately 301,000 residents through 44 public libraries and 42 school libraries. The services offered represent a significant investment by member municipalities and school divisions and deliver measurable and meaningful community impact. The core services are defined by Clause 9 of the MMA.

Core Services and Community Impact

Collection Services

YRL provides: A shared collection of 1,852 physical items including professional development materials and 134 kits. A shared collection of 83,149 digital items including eBooks, eAudio, video, comics, magazines, newspapers and 25 additional specialized databases with materials such as employment resources, study skills, grant databases and consumer information.

YRL provides: A per-capital book allotment for each library and school division and this amount comes from the levy to YRL. For library boards without library locations, YRL receives a rural services grant from Municipal Affairs Public Libraries Services Branch. The respective boards allocate funds from this grant to the library locations used by their residents. YRL transfers 100% of the funding to the designated library. Note: other regions do hold back a portion of the rural services grant.

Why YRL offers this: Access to information and recreational reading is fundamental to an informed, literate community. Shared collections provide economies of scale that individual municipalities could not achieve independently.

Why YRL offers this: Provision of a book allotment from the municipal levy paid to YRL is part of the MMA. This amount supports the provision of new material coming into communities and provides additional supports to local boards and their budgets. The amount of the book allotment is not in the MMA.

Related activities

- Selection and acquisition of materials based on community need.
- Cataloging and processing of 47,047 of added items annually (2025).
- Interlibrary loan services facilitating 4,988 items moved between YRL and locations outside of TRAC.
- Collection maintenance including weeding and inventory management.
- Delivery service traveling 166,250 kilometres per year to member libraries weekly to ensure materials reach communities in a timely manner.
- Working with vendors to negotiate pricing on materials and other services, with standard discounts on brand new popular fiction of 40% off list prices.

Digital Resources and Technology Access

YRL provides: 24/7 access to 27 databases, eBooks, audiobooks, streaming media, online learning platforms, and research tools. Public access computers and WiFi at all locations. YRL also provides and supports the websites for public library locations, network and file infrastructure and management services, and cybersecurity.

Why YRL offers this: Digital equity is essential in modern society. Many residents lack high-speed Internet access at home or updated devices. This can create barriers to employment, education, healthcare and accessing government services.

Why YRL offers this: Many libraries do not have access to consistent, dedicated, affordable technical services support, or the staff to monitor and manage the services.

Why YRL offers this: The provision of the online catalogue for residents to find resources is in the MMA.

Related activities

- Licensing and maintaining core business applications, including but not limited to Microsoft Office and websites.

- Tools to educate library staff on cybersecurity.
- Supporting 245 staff machines in libraries.
- Supporting 268 public access computers.
- Technical support for 2,816 assistance requests annually.
- Hot swap of equipment.
- Upgrades to network infrastructure.
- Digital literacy training and one-on-one technical help.
- Website platform, development and maintenance serving 562,255 annual sessions.
- Online catalogue access serving 2,139,316 annual visits.
- WiFi infrastructure supporting 1,220,914 connections annually.

Annual impact: 500,261 digital resource uses, more than 100,000 computer sessions, 1.2 million WiFi sessions, and 112 library staff trained in digital skills.

Children's and Family Services

YRL provides: Regional support for children's services including staff training, issues support, early literacy resources, summer reading program coordination, and specialized expertise to help member libraries deliver quality children's programming and services.

YRL provides: Support for library staff when supporting parents and families in selecting material for home use.

Why YRL offers this: Early literacy is a strong predictor of school success. Regional coordination and expertise help all member libraries, regardless of size, offer evidence-based early literacy programs and developmentally appropriate collections to meet the needs of their individual communities.

Why YRL offers this: Support for programming and collection development is in the MMA.

Related activities

- Training and professional development for library staff.
- Coordination of national summer reading program.
- Early literacy resource distribution.
- Development and maintenance of storytime and other programming kits.
- Consultation support on collection development, programs and policies.
- Support for 30 on-reserve/on-settlement programs or initiatives facilitated by member libraries.
- Specialized expertise in child development and literacy best practices.
- Evaluation and assessment tools for children's services, including Young Reader's Choice Awards, collection assessments and purchase recommendations supporting programs and community need.

Annual impact: Member libraries collectively used 45 kits curated for early literacy support in their programs.

Adult and Teen Programming

YRL provides: YRL provides support infrastructure, training, resources and expertise to enable member libraries to offer quality programming. Member libraries develop and deliver programming based on their individual community needs. YRL does not provide direct public programming.

Why YRL offers this: Regional support allows member libraries to access resources and supports most could not afford individually. The regional system provides resources that may be of interest to a library and community but may not be able to justify the expenditure. YRL provides kits, infrastructure, training, resources and expertise to enable member libraries to offer innovative and quality programming.

Related activities

- Training and professional development for library staff on program development and delivery.
- Access to programming resources and materials.
- Consultation and expertise on program design and community engagement.
- Support for program promotion and registration (website).

- Evaluation tools and best practices sharing across member libraries.

Annual impact: YRL launched Brainfuse in 2025 which supports adults and teens with live tutoring and job seekers with live interview preparation. This resource supported over 3,000 visits in the first three months of usage in 2025.

Information and Reference Services

YRL provides: Research assistance, readers' advisory, community information and data, statistical analysis and specialized support. Policy and procedure review and development. Support for boards on governance issues.

Why YRL offers this: YRL consultants and staff help library managers and boards navigate complex needs from readers' advisory to community data, governance and policy impacts. YRL licenses specialized statistical resources out of reach of most library boards.

Related activities

- Learn with Novelist (2025) provides 42 courses to support readers' advisory skill development.
- Provide in-depth support for community development and statistical interpretation through Environics.
- Support for library staff learning through Niche Academy and LinkedIn Learning, including the Librarian's Guide to Homelessness Academy.

Annual impact: 113 library staff trained in readers' advisory, over 10 libraries supported with plan of service development in the past three years, supporting informed, balanced decision-making across communities.

Social and Cultural Supports

YRL provides: Regional support for communities on a local interest level supporting the recreational and cultural needs of communities. This includes virtual reality kits; learning and making kits; kits supporting Indigenous ways of knowing including Métis cultural kits; smudging kits, including resources needed when working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

YRL provides: Supports to library staff to manage increasingly demanding customer interactions.

Why YRL offers this: The mission of YRL includes the requirement to support the informational, educational, recreational, and cultural needs of the communities we serve.

Why YRL offers this: YRL is positioned to obtain recommendation for training, programs and resources to support member libraries in addressing social issues including negative customer interactions, policy changes and critical incident debriefing activities.

Related activities

- Launch of Patron Incident Tracking System (PITS) in 2025 to support safety and security in member public libraries.
- Training and professional development for library staff, training more than 400 staff annually.
- Critical incident debriefing and crucial conversations facilitation for libraries after impactful events (covid, climate disaster, organizational change).
- Coordination of national summer reading program that promotes inclusion and accessibility.
- Development and maintenance of storytime and other programming kits, including 12 Indigenous kits developed over the last three years and World Language kits with resources covering eight languages.
- Consultation support on collection development, programs, and policies.

Annual impact: Member libraries offer inclusive, accessible programming supported by YRL programming kits and access to the TD Summer Reading Club to support patrons with print disabilities, newcomers and offer cultural learning as a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation in their communities.

Outreach and Accessibility Services

YRL provides: Large print, audio and video collections. Membership in consortia extends access to specialized services to those experiencing a print disability. Resources in multiple languages; programming support for seniors and special populations. Participation in pilot and research projects.

Why YRL offers this: Libraries serve all residents, including those facing barriers due to mobility, language, literacy, or other challenges.

YRL provides: Coordinated communication when programs and services impacting libraries and communities change, when services are offered at the provincial level. Most recently, changes to the Residential Tenancy Dispute Resolution Service process.

YRL provides: Presence and representation on projects with the potential to benefit YRL libraries. Recent projects include the development of supports for newcomers in rural areas (Rural Development) and supports for digital literacy training for senior populations (Simon Fraser University).

Why YRL offers this: In positioning YRL with projects that could have broad, rural impact, member library staff have opportunities to inform and influence the development of programs and services.

Related activities

- Participation in pilot and research projects (senior digital literacy, supports for newcomers in rural areas).
- Access to special collections through Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS).
- Multilingual materials in eight languages.

Annual impact: Statement from Stony Plain Public Library (SPPL) regarding The Happiness Programme: “Remarkably, this resident, who typically remains in their room and avoids activities, actively engaged with the programme. I wanted to share this wonderful story with you all and express my sincere gratitude for your unwavering support of this initiative. Your contributions have enabled SPPL to make a meaningful impact in the community.”

Facilities and Infrastructure

YRL provides: The board is responsible for YRL facilities. YRL does not own or operate public libraries; municipal library boards are responsible for operation and maintenance of their own facilities. YRL provides technology infrastructure, systems support and expertise to support library boards in maintaining modern and efficient library spaces.

Why YRL offers this: Centralized technology infrastructure and shared expertise create efficiencies and consistency across member libraries while allowing library boards to focus on local facilities management.

Why YRL offers this: Provision of centralized IT support is in the MMA.

Related activities

- Technology infrastructure and support for 44 public library locations and 513 computer workstations for staff and the public.
- Integrated library system maintenance and support.
- Technical consultation on facility technology needs.
- Coordination of system-wide technology standards.
- Support for accessibility and technology compliance.
- Assistance with space planning and technology integration.

Annual impact: 44 public library facilities supported with technology infrastructure and expertise. 76 visits annually to member libraries. More than \$300,000 cost avoidance to member library boards to connect to the Provincial SuperNet.

Operational Excellence

Behind the public-facing services, significant operational activities ensure quality and efficiency:

- Financial management and reporting to 54 municipalities.
- Human resources supporting 22.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.

- Information technology infrastructure supporting 534 staff users.
- Strategic planning and policy development.
- Governance support for the board.
- Advocacy and community engagement.
- Performance measurement and continuous improvement.
- Compliance with legislation and professional standards.

Current Situation

Funding Model Overview

YRL operates with the following funding model:

- Municipal allocation: Member municipalities provide per-capita funding based on population and at a rate agreed upon as part of the budget process, not to exceed the cost of inflation or the highest rate charged (2.5%) whichever is lower. Under the MMA, the municipal levy is intended to cover the cost of delivering the services as outlined in Clause 9.
- Provincial grant: The province provides a slightly higher per capita rate than the municipal allocation; however, not at current population levels. Provincial funding is intended to support resource sharing activities, innovation, province-wide initiatives, and strategic activities beyond the services as outlined in Clause 9.
- Other revenue: There is limited additional revenue available to YRL.

Historical Rate Context

Understanding the history of YRL's per capita rate structure is essential to evaluating the current request for adjustment. Major rate decision points are outlined below.

Year	Per Capita Rate	Change From Previous	Cumulative Inflation Rate From 1971	Real Value (Adjusted to 2026)
1971	\$1.00	Base year	–	\$7.92
2008	\$4.30	\$3.30	350%	\$6.23
2020	\$4.38	\$0.38	555%	\$5.29
2027 Proposed	\$5.60	\$1.22	727%	\$5.60

YRL was established in 1971 with an initial municipal levy rate of \$1.00 per capita. This rate was designed to provide baseline services and included book allotment for member libraries.

Time of Troubles: A levy increase of over \$1 per capita started a discussion around YRL programs and services, along with debates about the value of YRL membership. Once an agreement was reached, and a new MMA established, the board froze the levy rate at \$4.30 per capita. This freeze was in spite of inflationary and operational pressures. Staff layoffs and service reductions were put into place. The YRL Board requested during this time that the capital and general reserves be increased. The levy rate was frozen until 2020.

In 2019, the board approved the resumption of modest annual adjustments starting in 2020. These averaged 2% per year; however, in response to the covid pandemic and recognizing the financial strain on municipalities, the levy rate was frozen for one year. The levy rate increase resumed in 2022, and has not kept pace with post-pandemic inflation, or addressed the accumulated deficits from the 2008-2019 freeze.

Critical Funding Gap

Due to the extended rate freeze and insufficient rate adjustments since 2019, a structural funding gap has developed.

- Currently, approximately 18% of provincial operating grant funding is diverted to subsidize the core services that should be funded through the municipal allocation.

- This means that provincial funds intended to support resource sharing, service enhancement, innovation, and strategic initiatives are used to maintain basic contractual service obligations.
- YRL is, in effect, cross-subsidizing municipal obligations with provincial funds intended for other purposes.

Implications of This Subsidy

For YRL

- Approximately \$300,000 annually diverted from regional system development to subsidize municipal service obligations.
- Reduced capacity to invest in digital services.
- Limited ability to support member libraries with training, expertise and provincial initiatives.
- Delayed implementation of system-wide improvements and modernization projects.
- Vulnerability if provincial funding formulas change.
- Inability to fully leverage provincial partnership opportunities.
- Cannot continue with deficit operations. The responsible drawdown of excess reserves has eliminated the buffer that previously masked this problem.

For Member Municipalities

- Receiving contractually obligated services at below actual costs.
- Creating unsustainable dependency on provincial funds for core operations.
- Benefiting from reserve depletion which cannot continue.
- Risk of service disruption when reserves can no longer subsidize operations.
- Misalignment between MMA obligations and actual municipal contribution.

For the Province

- Creates accountability concerns around fund use and reporting.
- Advocacy discussions with the province regarding increase in operational funding becomes delicate.

For Regional System Development

- Delays in implementing shared technology or other shared initiatives.
- Postponed investments in staff training.
- Deferred initiatives that would benefit all member libraries.
- Slower rollout of support and infrastructure.
- Reduced capacity to provide expertise and support.

The \$0.75 Increase in This Context

The discussion in 2025 was for a levy increase of \$0.85 per capita. This request has been adjusted down to recognize the 2% increase for 2026 of approximately \$0.10 per capita.

The proposed increase is designed to:

1. Create a step towards restoring proper funding alignment. Ensures municipal allocation fully cover the services municipalities wanted to receive under the MMA.
2. Realign provincial funds for intended purposes. Allow provincial grant to support YRL development, technology, staff and strategic initiatives.
3. Strengthen provincial partnerships: Demonstrates municipal commitment and proper stewardship of provincial funds.
4. Ensure fiscal sustainability: Create a stable funding model that does not rely on cross-subsidization or deficit budgets.
5. Reduce and work towards elimination of deficit operation: YRL cannot continue to run deficits now that reserves have been responsibly right-sized.

What This Means for Municipalities

The proposed increase represents the cost of services municipalities are already receiving under the MMA. This is not a request to fund enhanced services or new programs. This is a correction to align municipal contributions with actual service delivery costs as contractually committed.

Realignment of the funding would prevent service reductions in the short and medium term. Long term, with continued predictable, consistent levy increases, YRL could address the following service priorities:

Enhanced Materials Funding

- Increase the per capita book allotment to member libraries by \$0.25 per capita, allowing them to:
 - o Expand collections to meet growing community demand.
 - o Acquire additional high demand print titles.
 - o Develop special collections to respond to local interest.
 - o Keep pace with rising book and media costs.

Expand eResource Content

- Review and enhance the digital resources available, working with partner libraries to ensure the best use of funds to support reasonable access.

Technology Infrastructure

- Accelerate region-wide technology upgrades currently delayed due to funding constraints.
- Participate in innovative process to issue and maintain provincial library access.
- Invest in digital infrastructure supporting new technologies.
- Upgrade YRL infrastructure.

Capacity

- Expand staff training and professional development.
- Improve shared service platforms to create efficiencies.

Currently, these are either proceeding at a slower pace, have workarounds or have been deferred entirely because provincial funds are used to cover the municipal allocation gap.

Why Further Adjustment is Required

While the 2% annual increases, when implemented have been essential to preventing complete collapse, they have not fully addressed the accumulated deficit from the 11-year freeze. Cost pressures include:

- Cumulative inflation based on Statistics Canada's Consumer Price Index of 21.1-22% between 2019 and late 2025. This results in cost increases that exceed the 2% annual levy rate adjustments when they were applied.
- Wage increases of 53% (Note: YRL is in competition with some of the highest-paying libraries in Alberta for trained staff at all levels).
- Utility cost increases of 14.2%.
- Benefits cost increases by 30%, even with service reductions and elimination.
- Insurance premium increases of 54%.
- Material costs for books have increased approximately 14% on hardcovers and 16% on paperbacks.
- Digital licensing costs increases of 10%, even with collection reductions.
- Population growth of 3% across municipalities requiring expanded services and increasing licensing costs for the higher population and to meet rising demand.
- Increase in fuel rates for delivery raise costs to move the 2.08 million items requested or purchased by YRL libraries (2025).
- Necessity to add increased technological monitoring to guard against and protect YRL and member libraries from cyberattacks.
- Increased need to educate library staff about cyberattacks and other threats.

Efficiency Measures Already Implemented

To absorb these costs without significant rate increases or service decline, the board has undertaken extensive strategic cost management activities:

Compensation Strategy

- Adopted a living wage commitment: The board made a strategic decision to ensure all staff positions receive a living wage, recognizing this as an ethical imperative in line with organizational values, and essential for staff retention in a competitive labour market.
- Implemented a compensation philosophy and policy: Established a benchmark of 15% above average market rate for positions to attract and retain qualified staff capable of serving member libraries effectively. (Note: YRL is in competition with some of the highest-paying libraries in Alberta for trained staff at all levels; this includes, but is not limited to St. Albert, Strathcona County, Edmonton, and the University of Alberta).
- Most positions now meet the benchmark. A systematic approach prioritized support positions.
- The compensation approach has been essential to prevent turnover, attract high-quality skilled staff, and maintain service quality but does represent a significant cost pressure that 2% increases cannot fully address.

Strategic Staffing Management

- Positions filled only when operationally necessary, not automatically upon vacancy.
- Careful evaluation of every vacancy to determine if it must be filled immediately, or if deferral is possible.
- Not all positions are filled at the level or classification they were originally positioned.
- Cross-training and workflow redesign to maximize efficiency of existing staff.
- Consolidated administrative functions, including the removal of a dedicated communications staff person and using a communications firm on contract at significant cost savings.

Benefits Plan Optimization

- Annual comprehensive review of benefits plan costs and utilization.
- Strategic elimination of underutilized services to control premium increases.
- Negotiated plan modifications to balance cost containment with employee needs.
- Despite these reductions, benefits costs continue to increase due to market factors beyond YRL's control.

Professional Development Reductions

- Professional development highly valued by the board as essential to service quality and required to maintain currency.
- Per-staff professional development budgets reduced to manage overall costs. Exception: Director position maintains professional development allocation in recognition of sector leadership requirements, professional obligations, and the need to maintain current knowledge for strategic decision-making.
- Staff encouraged to pursue low-cost and free professional development opportunities.
- Professional development tied to position requirements and benefit to YRL.

System-Wide Professional Development Restructuring

- Annual conference model completely redesigned: Transitioned from self-hosted conference to partnered conference model. Budget reduced from approximately \$25,000 to \$7,000 annually – a reduction of approximately \$18,000 or 72%.
- Now utilizing professional conference planner: Reduces staff workload and administrative burden and overall costs while maintaining event quality.
- Any conference surplus applied to following year: Priority is keeping costs down and ensuring fiscal sustainability.

- This restructuring maintains professional development opportunities for member library staff while dramatically reducing costs and administrative overhead.
- Demonstrates commitment to creative solutions that preserve service while controlling expenses.

Technology Infrastructure Transformation

Transitioning from local software hosting to cloud-based vendor hosting in partnership with other library systems in late 2026.

- This strategic shift will reduce annual hosting revenue by \$90,000 as partners move to the vendor.
- Full financial impact on YRL won't be known until 2027 as the transition completes and costs stabilize.
- The \$90,000 revenue reduction may be offset by anticipated savings in utilities, overtime, downtime and on-call costs.

This represents a strategic investment in the broader library partnership ecosystem.

- Potential for reduced overall costs across partner libraries: Vendor-managed cloud hosting could provide better economies of scale than the regional hosting model, though this will be evaluated as the transition proceeds.
- Reduced financial burden: For YRL and the other partners to fund and replace servers.
- Reduced electrical costs for regional system: Decreased server infrastructure and associated power consumption.
- Reduced staff on-call requirements: Eliminates need for 24/7 local technical support coverage, reducing operational burden.
- Eliminated server maintenance burden: Vendor assumes infrastructure management.
- Strengthened regional partnerships: Collaborative approach to shared systems and troubleshooting.
- Distributed support model: Partner organizations can now assist with troubleshooting and user support.
- Faster access to current software: Less downtime to plan and support upgrades.
- Improved system reliability and redundancy: Vendor-managed infrastructure typically offers better uptime and disaster recovery.

This transformation aligns operational changes with anticipated workforce transitions, creating a sustainable model that reduces technical infrastructure burden while maintaining service quality.

- Demonstrates strategic planning that coordinates technology decisions with long-term staffing considerations.
- Positions the partnership for modern cloud-based infrastructure without long-term financial burden.
- Aligns technology infrastructure with contemporary best practices in the library sector and positions the partnership for future innovation.

Board Governance Cost Reductions

- Eliminated or significantly reduced meeting catering costs: Board meetings now operate with minimal or no catering expenses.
- Transitioned to hybrid meeting model: Board and committee meetings now utilize Zoom technology, permitting online attendance.
- Reduced committee member travel costs: Members can attend remotely, eliminating mileage and travel time for those who choose virtual attendance.
- Maintained governance effectiveness while reducing associated operational costs.
- Board leading by example in cost containment measures.

Additional Efficiency Measures

- Implemented record purchasing from trusted vendors, reallocating 1 FTE library technician from cataloguing to serving school member libraries, saving \$50,000 per annum.
- Negotiated consortium purchasing agreements reducing material costs by 30-40%.
- Transitioned to energy-efficient systems.
- Automated routine processes to improve efficiency.

- Reduced discretionary operational spending across all budget categories.
- Budget clearly linked to strategic plan.

What These Measures Demonstrate

The board and administration have taken a comprehensive, strategic approach to cost management balancing:

- Service quality and staff retention (living wage, competitive compensation).
- Operational efficiency (strategic hiring, process improvements).
- Fiscal responsibility (benefits optimization, reduced professional development).
- Long-term sustainability (avoiding cuts that would create larger future costs).

These measures enabled YRL to continue providing quality services despite the smaller rate adjustments but has reached its practical limit.

Strategic Provincial Infrastructure Investment (2017-2020)

Between 2017 and 2020, the library system secured provincial infrastructure funding to undertake critical building upgrades, including:

- Complete window replacement improving energy efficiency and building envelope integrity.
- New door systems enhancing accessibility, security, and climate control.
- Full HVAC system modernization reducing energy consumption and improving air quality.

Impact of Infrastructure Investment

While the 2017-2020 infrastructure upgrades have reduced some facility operating costs, they do not address the core operational pressures driving this rate increase request:

- Reduced annual utility costs, partially offsetting operational cost increases.
- Deferring major capital replacement costs needed to be funded by the board.
- Improved accessibility and user comfort, contributing to increased facility usage.
- Created modern, welcoming spaces that serve as a gathering space for member library staff.

Important Note on Infrastructure vs. Operating Costs

These infrastructure improvements have:

- Personnel costs (the largest budget component) continue to rise.
- Collection costs (books, databases, digital licenses) have increased significantly above general inflation.
- Technology systems and infrastructure require ongoing investment and replacement.
- Programming and service delivery costs have grown with increased demand.

The infrastructure improvements, while valuable, represent one-time capital investments that have now been fully realized, and has removed significant pressure from the budget in the short and medium term.

Service Impact Without Rate Adjustment

Failure to implement a rate increase will necessitate service reductions. As the reductions would impact Clause 9 of the MMA, the final determination would need to be done by the board and ratified as a change by the members. At this time, the following service reductions are anticipated:

- Elimination of any new kit development.
- Decreased book allotment, resulting in fewer new materials.
- Decreased eResource purchases.
- Reduced staffing levels impacting customer service quality.
- Reduced absorption of technology costs, passing them to the library boards and risking erratic service and increased cybersecurity risks.
- Postponement of critical building maintenance creating future liability.

Proposed Solution

Rate Adjustment Details

We propose adjusting the municipal per capita rate from \$4.85 to \$5.60, representing an increase of \$0.75 per capita.

Why \$0.75 Is Necessary

This adjustment addresses:

- Funding model misalignment: Eliminates the unsustainable practice of diverting provincial funds to cover core municipal service obligations.
- The 2008-2019 structural deficit: The 11-year rate freeze created a cumulative gap that has never been fully recovered.
- Accelerated cost pressures: Digital licensing, wages, utilities and facilities costs have all increased well above the general inflation rate.
- Service agreement obligations: Ensures municipalities fully fund the services they have contractually agreed to receive.
- Provincial partnership integrity: Restores provincial grants to their intended purpose of supporting enhancement and innovation rather than subsidizing basic services.
- Strategic technology transition impacts: The cloud hosting transformation reduces annual hosting revenue by \$90,000 while improving service quality and operational efficiency; this revenue loss must be absorbed while maintaining service levels.

Context for the \$0.75 Request

If the rate had been indexed to inflation from 1971, the levy would be \$7.92 or 65% higher than the current rate.

If the rate had been indexed to inflation from 2008, it would be approximately \$6.23, or 30% higher than the current rate.

The proposed rate is still below the rate paid by municipal members of Parkland Regional Library System; they are the closest benchmark to YRL as neither region charges library boards.

The proposed rate is also below the provincial average paid by municipalities of all Alberta regional systems, accounting only for the municipal portion paid.

Regional Library System	Location	Member Public Libraries	2026 Municipal Levy (based on current population figures)	2026 Provincial Operating Grant (based on 2019 population figures)
Chinook Arch Regional Library System	Lethbridge	33	\$7.76	\$4.75
Marigold Library System	Strathmore	37	\$6.75	\$4.75
Northern Lights Library System	Elk Point	49	\$5.55	\$4.75
Parkland Regional Library System	Lacombe	49	\$9.99	\$4.75
Peace Library System	Grande Prairie	46	\$7.36	\$4.75
Shortgrass Library System	Medicine Hat	14	\$5.19	\$4.75
Yellowhead Regional Library	Spruce Grove	44	\$4.85	\$4.75
2026 Provincial Average with YRL	\$6.78		YRL Current Rate	\$4.85
2026 Provincial Average without YRL	\$7.10		YRL Proposed Rate	\$5.60

Notes

The seven Alberta regional library system boards establish their levy rate, based on their membership agreements. Of the seven, Parkland and Yellowhead have the same funding model (only charging municipalities).

The other five regional library systems charge both municipalities and library boards (the library board funding is ultimately paid for by the municipality through the budget request to council from their library boards), and they charge municipalities without a library board a higher rate; only the rate charged to municipalities with library boards is used here.

At this time YRL does not want to change the funding model and charge the library boards in addition to the municipalities, as the funds would still be provided to the library through the municipality.

Implementation

Immediate increase of \$0.75 per capita effective January 1, 2027.

Advantages

- Provides immediate operational stability.
- Simplifies budgeting with single adjustment.
- Preserves existing services and supports to member libraries.
- Ensures adequate regional staffing levels to provide expertise, training and technical support.
- Manages the structural deficit: Supports activities leading to balanced budget operations without relying on unsustainable provincial fund diversion.
- Restore proper funding alignment: Ensures municipal contributions fully cover contractual service obligations under the regional service agreement.
- Maintains modest operating reserves for financial sustainability, as recommended by sector best practices.
- Allows future planning for purchase of materials, collection development, training.
- Position the system competitively for future provincial grants and initiatives by demonstrating proper fund stewardship and matching requirements.

Challenges

- Additional pressure on municipal budgets.
- Municipalities may feel it appropriate to reduce the amount of support to local library boards. This is not a recommended approach; both need adequate funding to work.

Note: The recommendation is to return to regular, planned increases of up to 2% per year once the initial jump is complete.

Long-Term Sustainability

This rate adjustment establishes a foundation for financial sustainability and maximizes the return on previous investments. We commit to:

Financial Stewardship

- Annual budget transparency reports to all member municipalities.
- Regular rate reviews aligned with actual cost trends (avoiding future long-term freezes).
- Efficiency initiatives to control costs where possible.
- Exploration of alternative revenue sources to minimize municipal burden.

Protecting Past Investments

The 2017-2020 infrastructure upgrades represent a significant capital investment of provincial funds, totalling over \$1 million.

- Adequate operating funding is essential to maintain these improved facilities and maximize their useful life.
- Underinvestment in operations can lead to premature deterioration of capital assets, wasting the infrastructure investment.
- Current rate levels permit proper maintenance of upgraded facility.

Risk Analysis

Risks of Not Proceeding

- Funding model sustainability: The diversion of provincial funds to subsidize core municipal obligations is unsustainable and violates the intended purpose of provincial grants. This creates vulnerability if provincial funding priorities or formulas change.

- Reserve depletion: Excess reserves that previously masked the funding gap have been responsibly drawn down to appropriate levels. The organization cannot continue to run deficit budgets – without rate adjustment, service reductions to member libraries are inevitable by 2028.
- Service agreement breach risk: Municipalities are receiving contractually agreed services without fully funding them, creating a structural imbalance that cannot continue indefinitely.
- Provincial partnership jeopardy: Using provincial enhancement funds for basic operations undermines the library system's ability to pursue provincial strategic initiatives.
- Equity concerns: Service cuts will disproportionately affect vulnerable populations who rely most heavily on the services from their libraries and YRL.
- Competitive disadvantage: Neighboring systems with adequate municipal funding will be better positioned to leverage provincial enhancement funds for innovation, setting higher service expectations and attracting residents.
- Deferred costs: Postponing facility maintenance and technology upgrades creates larger future expenses that will eventually require even more significant rate increases.
- Staff retention: Inability to offer competitive compensation will result in turnover and service quality decline.
- Loss of provincial investment ROI: The 2017-2020 infrastructure upgrades represent significant provincial capital investment. Inadequate operating funding undermines the return on this investment and may affect future capital funding opportunities.

Mitigation Strategies

Enhanced Accountability

- Enhanced quarterly reporting on service outcomes and return on investment.
- Annual presentation to municipal councils on performance metrics.
- Transparent budget documentation with detailed line-item breakdowns.
- Key performance indicators tied to municipal funding levels.

Additional Revenue Strategies

- Joint pursuit of provincial and federal grant funding to offset municipal contributions.
- Leveraging the municipal-provincial partnership model to maximize provincial operating grants (which exceed municipal per capita rates).
- Exploration of philanthropic partnerships for capital projects and special initiatives.
- Possible revenue generation from enhanced fee-based services (meeting room rentals, special programs) or charge back to library boards for specific services.
- Regional collaboration opportunities to share costs.
- Advocacy for increased provincial operating grant rates to reduce municipal burden over time.

Service Guarantee

- Commitment to maintain service levels outlined in this document.
- Continued investment in services showing highest community demand and impact.

Recommendation

We respectfully request that member municipalities approve a \$0.75 per capita increase, raising the rate from \$4.85 to \$5.60 effective January 1, 2027. This adjustment is essential to maintain the quality library services our communities deserve and expect.

We welcome the opportunity to present this business case in detail, answer questions, and discuss the implementation, while meeting municipal budgeting processes and ensuring library service sustainability.