



## The Case for Investment Enabling Sustainable Yellowhead Regional Library Funding

# Overview



**54**  
Municipalities



**301,000**  
Residents



**86**  
Public and School  
Libraries

YRL delivers comprehensive services across 54 municipalities and three school divisions. YRL serves 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.

## A Decade of Deferred Increases

However, for 11 years—from 2008 through 2019—YRL’s board made a choice to freeze municipal library funding. While costs climbed and demands grew, the local appropriation rate stood still. The modest 2% annual increases since 2019, though helpful, have merely slowed the bleeding. They haven’t healed the wound.

### Implications of the Status Quo

#### For Member Libraries

- ▶ 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 Master Membership Agreement obligations and actual municipal contribution

#### 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

#### For YRL

- ▶ \$300,000 annually is being 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 the Province

- ▶ Creates accountability concerns around fund use and reporting

# The Hidden Cost of Inaction

Here's what most Councillors and residents don't see:



**Nearly one in five provincial dollars, meant for innovation, new resources, and expanded services, is instead being quietly diverted to “keep the lights on.”**

Provincial funds designated for enhancing your library's YRL experience—for digital resources, interlibrary cooperation, and strategic growth—are instead subsidizing basic operations that municipalities agreed to fund.

This isn't sustainable as it takes away from YRL's operational capabilities to pay for today's artificially suppressed costs.

## What Could Be Accomplished with Properly Allocated Provincial Funds?

If the \$300,000 annual provincial diversion was restored to the administrative budget, YRL could redirect the funds to benefit member libraries and their communities

### Immediate Priorities:

#### Enhanced Materials Funding

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

#### Expand E-Resource Content

- ▶ Review and enhance the digital resources available; expanding the collection and aligning the content to the best vendor.
- ▶ Provide access to additional online learning platforms

#### Technology Infrastructure

- ▶ Accelerate region-wide technology upgrades currently delayed due to funding constraints
- ▶ 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 work-arounds or have been deferred entirely because provincial funds are used to cover the municipal allocation gap.

# The Path Forward

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To deal with these pressures, YRL administration is asking the Board to consider an increase of \$0.75 per capita—raising the rate from \$4.85 to \$5.60. For the average household, this new rate represents the cost of two coffees per year.

## This adjustment will:

### → Restore accountability:

Municipalities will fund what they agreed to fund under the Master Membership Agreement

### → Align funding with purpose:

Provincial enhancement dollars will return to their intended purpose

### → Rebuild capacity:

After years of making do with less, our library system can again plan and deliver services strategically, rather than reactively

This isn't about expanding services or pursuing ambitious new programs. But we do need to ensure funding reflects current costs, and the responsibilities outlined in the Master Membership Agreement.

While we recognize the requested increase may be a burden for some municipalities, we are open to an option that includes a payment schedule with annual 5% increases until we reach \$5.60 per capita by 2029.

# The Bottom Line

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The proposed increase represents the cost of services municipalities are already receiving under the Master Membership Agreement. 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. This discussion has been ongoing since 2010, and it is time to take action before the gap grows even wider.