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**Report to / Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Public Library Board  
Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa**

**April 9, 2024 / 9 avril 2024**

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**File Number: OPLB-2024-0409-11.2**

**SUBJECT: Brand Strategy: Phase 1 - Research and Discovery**

**OBJET: Stratégie de marque Phase 1 - Recherche et découverte**

## **REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the Ottawa Public Library Board:**

- 1. Receive the results of the Brand Strategy Phase 1 – Research and Discovery, as attached in Document 1; and,**
- 2. Direct staff to proceed to Phase 2 – Brand Strategy Development, and report back to the Board by Q4 2024.**

## **RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa:**

1. **Prenne connaissance des résultats de la phase 1 de la stratégie de l'image marque – Recherche et découverte jointe en tant que Document 1; et,**
2. **Dirige le personnel à passer à la phase 2 – Élaboration de la stratégie de l'image de marque, et de faire rapport au Conseil d'ici le quatrième trimestre 2024.**

## **BACKGROUND**

In keeping with the *Public Libraries Act, RSO 1990, c.P.44* (the Act), other relevant statutes, laws, and good governance practices, the Ottawa Public Library (OPL) Board (the Board) holds accountability for the full range of decisions affecting the organization. The Board approaches its role using a policy or strategy model of governance that focuses on setting strategic directions and objectives, making decisions on major projects, and monitoring performance. The Board's attention focuses primarily on the long-term needs and goals, rather than the administrative or operational details.

As per Board Policy 001 – Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Trustees, trustees have a responsibility to define OPL's purpose and direction; review, and approve major strategies, plans, and decisions; and advocate on behalf of OPL. In alignment with approval of significant strategic initiatives, Board Policy 002 – Delegation of Authority, item #28, states that the Board retains authority to "Approve OPL corporate brand and visual identity" specifically the OPL logo and colour scheme.

The 2020 - 2023 Strategic Plan (OPLB-2019- 0601), approved by the Board in June 2019, included the direction to "Promote the Value of OPL" with an aligned priority to "Develop and implement a brand strategy." In September 2022, OPL engaged the services of an external consultant, Intent, a communications and design firm that has extensive experience working with non-profits, the public sector, and charities (including a number of Ontario public libraries). The focus of the consultative services is to develop a creative and forward-thinking new brand that will be used to demonstrate the value of OPL. This is being completed through three distinct phases of work:

1. Research and Discovery;
2. Strategy and Development; and,
3. Design and Visual Identity.

In February 2023, an Ad hoc Committee of the Board was established to provide staff with guidance regarding the development of a distinct and compelling brand identity, including advice on engagement components in Phase 1, on the strategy / approach components of Phase 2, and on design and visual identity components in Phase 3. Trustees Crawford and Smith, along with Chair Luloff as ex-officio, were appointed to the Ad hoc Committee. The Ad hoc Committee on branding has met six (6) times during Phase 1, providing valuable advice on the development of the research activities.

When the Strategic Plan for 2023 -2028 was approved by the Board in October 2023 (OPLB-2023-1010-10.2), the strategic priority to develop and implement a brand strategy remained under the updated strategic direction: "Demonstrate the Value of OPL." To note, other priorities included in the plan will benefit from a strong brand strategy: namely enhancing fund development; strengthening community relationships and advocacy; and integrating an ongoing commitment to intellectual freedom into all OPL activities.

The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of key findings from Phase 1 - Research and Discovery; and to seek direction to proceed to Phase 2 – Brand Strategy Development and report back to the Board by Q4 2024.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Context**

OPL provides valuable benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and OPL's brand needs to reflect its value to entice more residents to use its services. In other words, the Library needs to promote and market itself – to demonstrate its value – in a consistent, effective, and compelling way. Doing so requires a comprehensive and meaningful brand strategy founded on OPL's vision, mission, and values, and informed by data about residents' perceptions, awareness, and sentiments about the Library.

A brand is more than a logo or slogan: it is the consistent and recognizable feeling that is evoked by these elements. A comprehensive brand encompasses multiple elements such as the organization/brand name, a logo, graphics and images, colour scheme, typography, tone and voice (a significant element in conveying the brand personality), and a slogan. Together, these elements communicate a clear and intentional brand identity which is meaningfully reflective of the organization.

The role of public libraries, and the size and demographics of Ottawa, have evolved over the last two decades since OPL's current brand and visual identity were established following municipal amalgamation in 2001. OPL's logo was designed in-house leveraging the City of Ottawa logo and colour scheme. OPL's official logo is horizontal and integrates the wordmark in both English and French with a design element. The horizontal format of the logo poses challenges in terms of sizing and legibility when used in its entirety and no longer meets accessibility requirements. The logo has been particularly challenging to use with new technologies and social media. To address this concern, OPL staff developed a secondary, simplified visual marker (an element of the logo that does not include the wordmark, and which includes more balanced vertical and horizontal ratios). This secondary visual marker was not approved by the Board as part of OPL's official visual identity.

It should be noted that in 2006, a special edition logo (created by an external consultant) was used to commemorate the Library's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and in 2017 a unique logo was used for Canada 150-related events and activities. In addition, OPL's tagline, "If it's out there, it's in here!" was created as part of a broad marketing campaign that launched in 2010.

### **Phase 1 – Research and Discovery**

The first phase of the brand strategy project, the "Research and Discovery" phase, consisted of several consultation activities to ensure a broad and thorough gathering of both qualitative and quantitative data from clients, employees, management, community partners, and residents to assess awareness, perception, and sentiment regarding OPL. The results of Phase 1 Research and Discovery is attached in Document 1: Ottawa Public Library – Research Report (by Intent). What follows is an executive summary of key elements within the methodology and findings. Noted throughout this Board report are page references to the Research report where more information can be found.

The consultation and research activities sought to answer the following questions, all within the context of branding:

- How is OPL perceived?
- Where are the perceived gaps in messaging and understanding?
- What is OPL doing well?

To ascertain responses, both internal and external audiences were engaged using two primary methods – interviews/workshops, and surveys:

### Internal Consultation

Employees, managers, and other staff were invited to participate in workshops (in-person and virtual), aimed at uncovering how OPL is viewed as a brand, and what makes OPL valuable and unique in Ottawa. Structured with a combination of exercises and discussions, the workshops allowed participants to speak candidly about what makes OPL what it is, and how they would like to see OPL represented in the future.

Members of the Library Senior Management Team (LSMT) and the OPL Board were interviewed individually to get a sense of how OPL is perceived and used by the community. The questions and conversations addressed aspects such as OPL's most important value, what makes OPL unique or special, their aspirations for OPL, and what OPL should stop, start, and continue to do.

In addition, employees were invited to complete a survey to assess employee alignment with the organizations' values, vision, and mission, and to gain information about how employees think clients perceive and benefit from OPL. Questions were asked regarding how employees believe OPL should present itself in tone and personality. More than 65 per cent of employees participated in this survey.

### External Consultation

For focused input, Intent reached out to a diverse range of community organizations to gain insights regarding their perception of OPL. In total, five organizations were interviewed: three organizations serving immigrants, one non-profit serving people with disabilities, and one public housing group.

For broader input, a public survey was launched in early October 2023 for a seven-week period. Clients and non-clients could complete the survey online or in branch (hardcopy). The public survey included 45 questions with the first 18 questions asked of all respondents; the survey then split into two streams with seven questions asked of people who used OPL in the last year. Non-users were asked eight questions. The final 10 questions were based on demographics (age, postal code, education, etc.) for statistical and representation purposes.

The survey was promoted widely during the seven weeks in various ways:

- Targeted message to more than 600 community groups and organizations asking them to share the survey with their networks and clients;
- Direct email inviting all clients with an email address on file to complete the survey;

- Direct “ask” to current clients and employees to invite non-clients in their networks to complete survey;
- Interactive presence at several shopping malls, recreation centres, and community events;
- Distribution of survey rack cards at City of Ottawa facilities, OPL public programs, and various community outreach events;
- Digital signage at all City of Ottawa recreation centres;
- Promotion on Instagram, Facebook and “X” with images, reels, posts;
- Paid advertising on Instagram and Facebook;
- Signage and promotion in OPL locations and on the OPL website; and,
- An incentive for survey participation.

The response to the public survey was positive and enthusiastic. More than 18,000 people completed the survey, with 92% stating that they used OPL at least once in the last 12 months. With the wide and varied promotion, staff were aiming to ensure that the response to the public survey achieved close to demographic representation. This occurred in all but two of the four demographics that are traditionally hard to reach: racialized persons and immigrants, however, the size of the samples (1,427 and 2,090 respectively) while not proportionately representational are statistically significant.

### Findings

The research yielded valuable insights for strategic branding and communications, with areas of convergence and divergence in perception, awareness, and sentiment. These insights will be considered in the development of the brand strategy as elements to reinforce existing perceptions / sentiments or areas for opportunities to alter perception / sentiment. A summary of the key findings is noted below.

How Ottawa Public Library is perceived (p.44).

The following identifies key insights on essential themes or actionable items regarding client perception, sentiment, and awareness of OPL. Themes are summarized in two categories: areas of convergence and areas of divergence.

Convergence - All stakeholder groups shared these perceptions of OPL:

- Connection - The concept that OPL provides and inspires connection of various forms (in-person, digitally, through programs, etc.) came through repeatedly across all research methodologies. Importantly however, external audiences

clearly indicated that social connections (e.g., that the library is a place to hang out and socialize, or to meet people, etc.) was not seen as important or relevant. However, in these times of increased isolation, work from home, and ever-expanding digital intrusion into our lives, the research, across all methodologies, was clear that people see OPL as a place (or concept) for connection to various elements such as technology, knowledge, community, activities, resources, and more.

- OPL is integral to the community - OPL's role in the community, as well as the way it promotes and creates community, was a key shared perception. Whether people visit the library or not, OPL is clearly perceived as a key component of Ottawa life. Additionally, community service organizations see OPL as a potentially significant organization to help their clients / audiences feel more connected to the community of Ottawa. It is clear that OPL is a vital institution and hub for all Ottawans, both old and new.
- Staff are highly valued and trusted - OPL staff are viewed as experts. The public survey ranked the trust they have in OPL staff highly, referring to their ability to foster literacy and help their children learn and grow. There is a clear sense from both clients and non-clients that library staff are exceptional, and they are vital to the success of the library, and that their service is exceptional. Comments from the Board and management are highly complimentary of staff, particularly noting that they deliver quality service, and have a warm, client-based approach.
- Breadth of service - All stakeholder groups acknowledged the breadth and depth of services and programming on offer at OPL. In the internal workshops, there was the strong feeling amongst participants that "OPL is more than just books" or that people need to see what OPL offers "beyond books."
- Books are the mainstay of the library - While perhaps obvious, books and access to them is the number one thing people associate with a library. Staff expressed how much OPL has to offer in its services, programming, and large non-book collections. However, what is abundantly clear from the public survey in particular is that books continue to be a mainstay of the library even for those who avail themselves of other services as well.

- Visual identity - The survey results indicate that the OPL visual identity can be confused or conflated with the City of Ottawa visual identity. Internal stakeholders state the connection as a fact, with some indicating the connection is not necessary because OPL is a separate entity from the City.
- OPL is a unique public space - The Ottawa community sees OPL as a unique space: it is free, it features a wide array of services and resources, and it is a calm space in the city. Both clients and non-clients saw OPL as a place to come and simply “be,” something that is rare elsewhere in the city, and they both also saw significant value in a space that was free and which had no expectation of purchase.
- Desire to be more bold - Internal stakeholders believe that OPL is not loud enough with its promotions and communications, and that there is a requirement for more communications and promotional campaigns. External stakeholders indicated that marketing and promotions directed to community groups will help build awareness. Finally, most non-clients don't visit simply because OPL is not top of mind, indicating more can be done to build top-of-mind awareness.
- Who benefits most from the library - All stakeholder groups agreed that young children, those with low income, as well as retired people and seniors benefit the most from OPL. There was some divergence in the degree to which each of those groups benefited, but they were all among the top five. All respondents felt that teens were among the least likely to currently benefit from OPL. Newcomers to Canada and teen audiences were singled out in particular by internal stakeholders as key potential audiences.
- A welcoming public space - All stakeholder groups stated that OPL is a unique space in Ottawa as a free public institution that offers a broad range of services and resources for everyone. While external audiences did not see OPL as a café alternative (i.e., a place to hang out), they do understand that a public library is a welcoming and free public space for all.

Divergences - The following describes the differences in perceptions between internal and external groups:

- Top Benefit - Internal stakeholders feel that OPL being completely free is the top benefit or value to clients. However, public survey respondents indicated that



they value the collections most. This may speak to the theme that the public inherently understands that access to the collection is free, so while it appears on the surface as a divergence, there may be contextual convergence. This is an interesting and key point, external audiences see OPL's top value as "Books and more", while internal audiences are more focused on OPL as a free resource.

- Library experience - While OPL's strategic direction specifies a redefinition of the library experience and the creation of the central branch as a "destination," the idea of the library as a destination to socialize/hang out was not widely accepted by the public. External respondents clearly indicated that the library – while seen as relaxing, comfortable, and calm – is primarily a destination for active or single-action tasks such as borrowing from the collection or participating in programming. In another divergence, stakeholders place a high value on OPL's ability to create a sense of community and connection, and again, research conducted by Intent shows that branches are active, purpose-driven locations, rather than places to go to make social connections, or spend leisure time. As a result, it is key to not diminish the importance of the books in the collection, reframing the often-used phrase "beyond books" to "books and more."
- Brand and Visual Identity - There are internal stakeholders who feel OPL's visual identity is too linked to the City of Ottawa brand; especially since OPL is a separate entity from the City. However, external stakeholders did not overwhelmingly confirm if this linkage causes confusion as some internal stakeholders suggest. There was some overlap in the survey responses, but not in the majority. For the overall brand, internal stakeholders feel that OPL is stodgy, bureaucratic, and institutional referring to the personality of the brand. This sentiment was not shared by external stakeholders.
- Awareness of fines and fees - Internal stakeholders and the majority of clients understand that OPL no longer charges late fines for overdue materials. Non-clients are less clear about this. This is a communications challenge, but directly relates to both brand perception and may have an impact on library usage.

#### Gaps in Messaging and Understanding (p. 46)

The following summarizes the gaps in messaging and understanding, identifying where OPL needs to take further action, as part of ongoing communications, to better

understand why the gap exists and what can be done to reduce it. These are areas that will be addressed via Phase 2: Brand Strategy.

- Audience segmentation - It is believed among internal stakeholders that OPL could do a better job of segmenting various audience groups to enrich understanding of the value of OPL.
- Opportunity to build awareness and usage - Internal stakeholders have a great sense of pride in OPL and believe that a lack of promotion results in the public not fully realizing OPL's benefits. There is an opportunity to promote the breadth of services more effectively.
- Commitment to literacy - Internal stakeholders believe that OPL plays a pivotal role in literacy, and that the public should better understand OPL's commitment to literacy. External audiences see OPL as a place and resource for learning and studying but there may be a gap to bridge by demonstrating OPL's services and supports for literacy and informal lifelong learning, broadly speaking.
- Intellectual freedom - The protection and preservation of Intellectual Freedom came through clearly with internal stakeholders. This strategic imperative was not echoed by external stakeholders. OPL must do a better job of communicating this concept to the public and understanding the potential brand impacts associated with OPL's position on freedom of expression.
- Community partnerships - Various stakeholder groups believe that there are missed opportunities to partner with strategically chosen community organizations to bring new audiences to OPL, and to help those audiences and organizations achieve their various goals.

What OPL is doing well (p.47)

These areas of strength are important considerations in building the brand strategy.

- Value to the community - OPL is a pillar of the community, and all stakeholders including the interested public are fully engaged with the organization and wish to further engage in the future.
- Organizational trust - Trust was a strong theme with the public trusting OPL in all aspects of its work, including how OPL disseminates information to the community.

- Staff expertise - Staff are viewed as helpful and as having expertise of benefit to clients.
- Unique public spaces - In the public survey, the top four responses to “What are your favourite things about Ottawa Public Library?” refers to the fact that OPL is free, has a variety of books and other items to borrow, is open to everyone, and is conveniently located.
- Variety - OPL’s broad and deep catalogue, along with its diverse range of programs and services is well regarded and appreciated.

### **Conclusion (p. 48)**

Libraries are continuously evolving, responding to the needs of their community by offering programming and services to inform, inspire, and connect people. This extensive research phase has provided insight from which to draw on in the development of the new OPL Brand Strategy. Through this phase, several key takeaways have been identified:

- Visiting the library may not be a habit or part of people’s regular routine. People need to see the value in choosing to come to OPL before other alternatives.
- Books continue to be important to OPL’s external audiences, which is the opposite of the strategic direction of many modern library systems.
- OPL is a place for people to connect with a wide variety of programs, services, collections, and is seen as a partner in unifying and celebrating communities. There is potential and a willingness from other organizations to partner further.
- We know from other data analysis that when programs and services increase, system usage increases. While audiences said that books are the most important feature of OPL, additional offerings (such as programs) increase participation and circulation rates.
- OPL has a trusted, expert staff team with specialized skills. This team guides OPL clients in their experiences when coming to the library.
- OPL can position itself as a strong supporter of intellectual freedom by being bold in its stance and championing free expression in a variety of ways.

- Those who know and are well connected to OPL believe it can better promote itself, especially through direct engagement with individual demographic groups.
- The public knows, trusts, and thinks highly of OPL.

### **Next Steps**

Upon receipt of this report, staff will proceed to work with Intent on Phase 2 - Brand Strategy Development, centered on creating an authentic brand strategy informed by these research findings. The brand strategy will include the following components:

- Brand brief, identifying the core attributes and a brand promise;
- Brand differentiators and competitive advantages;
- A value proposition for general and target audiences; and,
- Recommendations for implementation across OPL's touchpoints.

Based on the research in Phase 1, Phase 2 will begin with focus groups with newcomers, visible minorities, seniors, and teens to better understand the needs and interests of these key groups. It will further include an undertaking of comparable library and community service brand research, an audit of OPL's existing brand, and the development of audience personas.

The Phase 2 – Brand Strategy report will come to the OPL Board for approval no later than Q4 2024.

### **CONSULTATION**

The development of this report required consultation with various stakeholders, including members of the public, as noted throughout the report.

### **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

Ottawa Public Library complies with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (2005)* in its operations. There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

### **BOARD PRIORITIES**

This report aligns with the Board- approved Strategic Plan, Direction #3 - Demonstrate the Value of OPL.

## **BUSINESS ANALYSIS IMPLICATIONS**

Throughout the report, the business and data analysis implications are noted, including data related to brand recognition, library usage, and survey participation. Future business analysis implications will be considered as part of Phase 2, and before any new brand strategy is launched.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications associated with this report are related to the costs to promote the public survey in October and November 2023, as noted in the Discussion section of this report. In total, promotional activities including advertising, the incentive prizes, and “rack” cards represented approximately \$10K.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

## **INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS**

In living out OPL’s value of Inclusion, OPL tries to incorporate a diversity of perspectives to ensure that OPL represents the community it serves and address systemic barriers and inequities faced by some members. As such, equity implications for all equity deserving groups, including racialized people, those who identify as women, those who identify as gender diverse, those who identify as LGBTQI2S, children and youth, older adults, and immigrants, were considered as part of the external engagement noted throughout this report.

In seeking to gather input for the Research and Discovery Phase of the brand strategy, it was important that OPL reach all members of the community, including a demographically representative sample of Ottawa residents. The promotional approach (as noted in the Discussion above) intended to seek input from a broad range of Ottawa’s population, including those who do not use the library.

In Phase 1 input, OPL achieved greater representation of Indigenous people, with 4% of respondents identifying as Indigenous compared with 3% of the Ottawa’s population according to the latest Canadian census. In addition, OPL achieved greater representation among those who identified as women (69% of respondents versus 51% in the general population). As noted in the Discussion section above, survey

participants from racialized persons and immigrant groups were under-represented with 9% and 13%, respectively. To address this, Phase 2 will include Focus Groups with these demographics. Among all other equity deserving groups, OPL achieved relatively equal input as representation in the Ottawa community.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

### **TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no technology implications associated with this report.

### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1 Ottawa Public Library – Research Report (by Intent)

### **DISPOSITION**

Upon receipt of this report by the OPL Board, staff will work with consultants to develop the Brand Strategy Phase 2, for Board approval by Q4 2024.