Message from the Chair

We're pleased to share this document with the public as it showcases the hard work and dedication of ECRL staff. This Strategic Operational Plan will help explain the innovative projects currently underway and the work ECRL is striving to achieve in the 2025-2026 budget year. ECRL operations are incredibly productive, with the lowest per open-hour cost of any library organization in the province. This document will help guide the organization in maximizing its limited resources for even greater benefit to the community.

Kind regards,
Clair Rankin

Introduction

Eastern Counties Regional Library (ECRL) began a strategic planning process in August 2024 with the assistance of a consulting firm. A provincial grant enabled ECRL to take this historic step. The goal was to have a completed three-year strategic plan by April 2025 to align with the beginning of the new provincial funding formula.

Unfortunately, the new provincial library funding formula was not implemented in April 2025 as anticipated, and ECRL did not receive a funding increase in the 2025-2026 provincial budget. Static funding levels and the lack of a new funding formula, which typically covers a five-year timeframe, mean that ECRL has no future financial information. Without a financial forecast, ECRL can't logically determine its activities or capacity for growth for the next three years. If ECRL does not receive a funding increase in the April 2026 budget, there is a significant risk that ECRL will have to consider service cuts due to current financial pressures.

On a positive note, our strategic planning process yielded incredibly valuable information and insights that we are acting on immediately. We have prepared a one-year Strategic Operational Plan for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. This document outlines our five strategic pillars along with the corresponding planned operational activities.

The table below, which contains data from the 2023-2024 Provincial Statistics from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage, highlights ECRL's operational efficiency. Managing regular operations requires approximately 85-90% of staff time, due to ECRL's extremely low staffing levels. The lowest in the province, in

fact. This is why it is so essential to focus our efforts with the remaining 10-15% of organizational capacity.

Location	Total hours open	Total staff (FTE)	Staff expense per hour	Number of employees
Annapolis Valley Regional Library	18,230.00	39.90	$107.66	77
Cape Breton Regional Library	21,708.75	54.70	$111.91	62
Colchester-East Hants Public Library	8,086.50	30.90	$216.77	58
Cumberland Public Libraries	10,225.00	21.50	$100.31	25
Eastern Counties Regional Library	**14,226.75**	**17.35**	**$66.45**	**24**
Halifax Public Libraries	37,452.50	304.85	$532.97	360
Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library	14,316.00	42.10	$122.73	59
South Shore Public Libraries	8,825.50	17.00	$136.72	27
Western Counties Regional Library	13,058.00	26.80	$112.00	46

Please note that ECRL has the second lowest level of annual operating funding of any Public Library Region. The 14,226.75 provided in public library open hours is a tremendous return in service for this investment.

Critical Work to Date

- **A Reorganization of Regional Staffing:** The leadership team was restructured to clarify areas of responsibility, increase decision-making efficiency and include strategic priorities. Regional Library Assistant duties and responsibilities were also clarified with updated job descriptions. As service provided at local library branches depends so critically on regional operations, it is essential that staff working at the Regional Office operate with maximum efficiency and sustainability.

- **Procedures and training documentation:** Past practices and procedures conducted by Regional Library Assistants were examined, and essential

documented procedures were redeveloped and clarified to maximize efficiency, sustainability, and occupational health and safety. This work was a vital step in ensuring that our regional operations are sustainable.

- **IT infrastructure development:** ECRL outsourced IT by hiring ScotiaComp Technologies. Hiring a company that provides their level of expertise was a transformative decision. Local branch technology (computers, printers, scanners, etc.) has been significantly improved and are now far better maintained than they were in the past. Upgrades and IT improvements will continue to be a top priority in 2025-2026.

ECRL's Strategic Pillars

1. **Sustain core (traditional) public library services:** We heard from the community that traditional or core public library services, such as the borrowing of books, **are a top priority**. These foundational services must be maintained and prioritized despite various financial pressures.

2. **Increase access to library services and facilities:** Since 2012, ECRL has increased its **total open hours by 50.06%.** They increased from 9,480.75 in 2012 to 14,226.75 in 2023. Increasing access to library services and facilities **has always been a strategic priority** for the Board and will continue to be a key priority in our strategic operational plan.

3. **Advocate for public library services:** Implement a communications and public relations strategy that explains, publicizes, and advocates for public library services. It is crucial **to establish an accurate perception of our services** and their value to the community and our Municipal partners. We need public support and goodwill to help find funding solutions for our annual operations.

4. **Engage the community and Municipal partners:** Build on the communication strategy to create opportunities for dialogue. We need to hear from community and Municipal partners about their perceptions of our work, their service priorities, and any opportunities for partnership development.

5. **Amplify Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA):** The library must reflect the community, and our EDIA work is the way to make this a reality. A key initiative of the upcoming year is on establishing our Accessibility Advisory

Committee and reviewing our communications, both internal and externally to ensure they align with accessibility standards.

ECRL Operational Projects & Activities for 2025-2026

Please note that many of the following activities will be funded by grants, donations, increased Municipal funding or be achieved through strategic partnerships. ECRL has historically been very successful finding alternate means to fund projects which can make our annual funding challenges more confusing for the public to understand. Where possible we will highlight funding sources in the following:

1. **Sustain core (traditional) public library services:** Regular operations involve many activities that support and sustain core public library services. Highlighted below are special projects that involve significant upgrades or are unusually complex or large pieces of work.

Project	Description	Funding	Status
Kiosk Internet Upgrade	Implement a technological solution to restore service at the Kiosk in Port Hawkesbury to maintain community access. Internet and database connection were upgraded to make the Kiosk service more sustainable.	Donation of installation costs from ScotiaComp Technologies	*Complete*
New Van onboarding & branding	Complete onboarding of the new delivery van. Seek permission from all Municipal partners to use their logos in branded decals for the van. Seek funding source to pay for decals. Investigate a ramp solution for the van and obtain costs for Board review.		In Progress
Regional Office Phone System Upgrade (VoIP)	Upgrade Regional telecommunication infrastructure as the current system is failing and so old that it cannot be repaired.	Donation of installation costs from ScotiaComp Technologies	*Complete*
Regional Office Facility Renovations	ECRL's Regional Office Facility requires major renovations. Before proceeding with work further assessment of the building condition is required. A grant application *(cont.)*	$250,000 Provincial Grant	In Progress

	will be made for funds to cover project management fees.		
Regional Office Basement Collection Disposal	Remove damaged and older materials from the Regional Office basement. Priority areas include materials impacted by flooding and mould in preparation for mould mitigation work.		

2. Increase access to library services and facilities

Project	Description	Funding Source	Status
Alexander Doyle Public Library Internet Upgrade	Installation of a new Internet connection in the library to significantly improve service at that location while increasing community Internet access.	Donation	***Complete***
St. Peter's Hub Project	Moving the St. Peter's Library to a new community hub location with the Visitor's Information Centre. Installing a self-check to increase access to collections during VIC only hours. Installing a Wi-Fi extension to expand the reach of the Library's WiFi.	Municipal grant	In Progress
Wi-Fi Hotspot Loan Program	New service introduced this Spring to expand Internet access.		***Complete***
Whycocomagh Public Library	New library location to open this year, includes collection development, space design and planning, and set-up. The operations will be funded by the Municipality of the County of Inverness.	Additional Municipal funding	In Progress

3. Advocate for public library services

Project Title	Project Description	Funding Source	Status

	Develop an organizational communications strategy, including quarterly Impact Reports for municipal partners, directions for newsletter submission and program promotion.		In Progress
Communication Strategy			

4. Engage the community and Municipal partners

Project Title	Project Description	Funding Source	Status
Community Engagement Survey	Develop survey to be used annually for community engagement, promote, analyze, and report on findings.		In Progress
Food Security Grant	Continue to engage with partners to support food security initiatives in the community through seed libraries, collection development, and communications.	Provincial grant	In Progress
Host Book Sale Event	Host the Scotia Days Annual Book Sale, explore options for additional events.		In Progress
Volunteer Recruitment Development	Review current policies and update, explore volunteer roles and options.		

5. Amplify Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA)

Project Title	Project Description	Funding Source	Status
Accessibility Advisory Committee	A committee will be convened to inform accessible library services across the region.		In Progress
Accessibility Review	Review all ECRL templates to align with accessibility standards and begin updating policies & procedures with these templates.		

Coordinate with the Municipality of the County of Inverness during renovations at Cheticamp Public Library	Improvements to the facility include installation of an accessible door and floor replacement. Possible closure required and movement of collections and equipment. Public communication also necessary.	Accessibility grant received by the Harbour Authority	In Progress (floor complete door still to install)
Community Wellbeing Product Distribution	Continue to coordinate the Community Wellbeing product program, explore potential funding to sustain the program long-term	Provincial Menstrual Product Grant	In Progress (nearing end of funds)

Aspirational Goals

Project Title	Project Description	Funding Source	Status
Disaster preparedness planning for all locations	Develop emergency response plans for all locations.		

Your Feedback

We invite your comments about this plan. A survey has been developed to capture your feedback and will be available until September 30, 2025:

https://ecrl.surveysparrow.com/s/ECRL-Strategic-Planning---Operational-Plan/tt-c1Hl5

If you would like to make us aware of partnership or funding opportunities, please do so. Any questions you have are welcome.

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