



PACE was retained in March 2016 to develop and execute a Public Engagement Framework in support of the Ottawa Public Library's (OPL) plans to relocate its Main branch and build a new Ottawa Central Library in the City's Central Area.

OPL has ambitious plans to contribute to Ottawa's transformation into a world-class city with a modern iconic library. The plans, however, sparked a passionate debate; as with any change, some see the new central library as an opportunity, others see it as unwelcome change. This put a strain on relationships and created distrust among some of the traditional supporters of OPL, overshadowing what should have been an exciting community discussion about an important civic building.

As a first step in this assignment, PACE conducted a needs assessment to inform the development of a public engagement framework. This involved a thorough review of key background materials and of relevant media and social media coverage to enable us to get a profound understanding of the issues and to develop a stakeholder map. Once completed, we conducted stakeholder interviews with OPL board trustees (including Councillor McKenney), the Mayor, locally elected officials, post-secondary institution executives, leading urban planners, key community leaders, the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, relevant community associations, and representatives from key interest groups. The objective was to pre-consult with a broad range of 'voices' and interests, from all sides of the project.

PACE's framework aimed to establish a common understanding of the project objectives and the opportunities for public input and dialogue. One of the primary goals was to address public concerns with a view to 'clearing the air,' thereby allowing for more cohesive support for the OCL to grow. Engagement activities (both communications and consultation) were designed to reassure the community and stakeholders that the planning process is robust, rooted in best practices, informed by public dialogue, and that it will result in a new Ottawa Central Library that meets or exceeds community expectations. Strategic communications hinged on two key themes — the need to:

- Frame OCL as city-building, to the benefit of all Ottawans; and
- Reinforce that OCL's decision-making process is the most robust in Canada for a library.

The program is ongoing. Participation in PACE-led public consultation activities has been positive and productive, and has generated useful input into the decision-making process for the new OCL. The CBC reported the new central library as one of the "5 biggest City of Ottawa stories of 2016."