

THE MUSKOKA LAKES PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

FOR

**LIBRARY SYSTEM SERVICE AND SPACE
REVIEW**

Reference #: MLPL RFP 2026-001

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| RFP Issue Date: | February 12, 2026 |
| RFP Closing Date and Time: | Submissions must be received by 5:00 p.m. local time on Thursday March 5, 2026. |
| Submission e-mail address: | andrew.whitfield@mlpl.ca |
| RFP Closing Location: | Norma and Miller Alloway Muskoka Lakes Library (Port Carling Branch) 69 Joseph St. PO Box 189 Port Carling, ON P0B 1J0 |
| Project Manager: | Andrew Whitfield, CEO/Chief Librarian Muskoka Lakes Public Library |
| Notice: | Late submissions will not be accepted The lowest or any bid not necessarily accepted |
| Addenda (if necessary) posted to: | https://www.muskokalakes.ca/library/about-us/requests-for-proposals-rfp/ |

1. Community & Library Overview

The Township of Muskoka Lakes is located in the heart of the District of Muskoka, situated at the southern tip of the Canadian Shield. The Township encompasses a large geographic area surrounding Lakes Muskoka, Rosseau, and Joseph. Within approximately 780 square kilometres are numerous lakes and rivers, wetlands, bedrock shorelines, and islands. The natural environment and shoreline communities make Muskoka Lakes a globally recognized tourism and recreational living destination.

The Township's population includes approximately 7,800 permanent residents (2021 Census) and a significantly larger seasonal population. Permanent residency is primarily concentrated in the communities of Port Carling and Bala, along with surrounding rural areas, while seasonal residency is concentrated along the waterfront. In recent years, Muskoka Lakes has experienced a shift in seasonality, with many residents who were once present only during short summer periods now spending extended portions of the year in the Township, including shoulder seasons and year-round occupancy. This shift has implications for public services, facilities, and access to community supports throughout the year.

Library service in Muskoka Lakes has a long and established history, originating in the late 19th century through the Mechanics' Institute movement, with organized service beginning in Port Carling in 1887. In 1895, the Mechanics' Institute became the Port Carling Public Library, and in 1905 the Library was taken over by the municipality and placed on the tax roll, establishing it as a publicly funded service. Over time, library service expanded to multiple communities across the Township, reflecting a strong commitment to local access in a rural and seasonal municipality.

Following municipal amalgamation in 1971, the Muskoka Lakes Public Library system included several branch locations serving a geographically dispersed population, including Bala, Milford Bay, Ullswater, and Walker's Point. Over subsequent decades, service was consolidated to the current two-branch system in Port Carling and Bala, which together form the Muskoka Lakes Public Library (MLPL). Two former MLPL branch locations — Milford Bay and Walker's Point — continue to operate as volunteer-run community libraries, maintaining a local presence and contributing to the broader library landscape within the Township.

In 2001, the Port Carling Library relocated from the Memorial Community Centre to its current purpose-built facility. A significant philanthropic contribution from the Alloway family, made in honour of Norma and Miller Alloway, enabled the completion and enhancement of the building when construction costs exceeded original projections. In recognition of this contribution, the facility was formally named the Norma and Miller

Alloway Muskoka Lakes Public Library, though it is commonly referred to as the Port Carling Library or Port Carling Branch.

The Muskoka Lakes Public Library is governed by an independent Library Board and today provides access to physical and digital collections, public technology, learning resources, and community programming for residents and visitors of all ages. As the Library approaches nearly 140 years of continuous service, it reflects a long-standing community commitment to access to information, literacy, and shared public space.

MLPL is one of the few year-round public services consistently open to the community, particularly during the winter months when many other facilities operate seasonally or on reduced schedules. During this time, the Library functions as an important community hub, offering programs and services that support seniors, families, and other year-round residents, as well as access to technology, information, and social connection.

Library use fluctuates throughout the year in response to seasonal population changes, evolving service expectations, and increasing reliance on digital services. These dynamics, alongside broader changes in how communities engage with information and technology, underscore the importance of ensuring that MLPL's services and facilities remain flexible, accessible, and responsive to both current needs and future change.

2. Project Introduction & Background

The Muskoka Lakes Public Library is issuing this Request for Proposals (RFP) to retain a qualified consultant to undertake a Library Service & Space Review of the MLPL system, including the Port Carling and Bala branches.

To date, MLPL has not completed a formal, comprehensive service and space master plan. However, the library is guided by Governance Board, strategic plans, operational planning, and Board-approved policies that support accountable service delivery and continuous improvement. Key guiding documents include the MLPL Strategic Plan 2025–2028, along with relevant policies and procedures related to service delivery, collections, accessibility, and facilities.

This project will provide a structured, evidence-based review of current services and spaces, identify gaps and opportunities, and recommend both immediate improvements and medium-term options to support a 3–7 year planning horizon. The work is intended to be practical and actionable, supporting MLPL's decision-making and future capital and service planning.

3. Definitions

Library / MLPL: Muskoka Lakes Public Library system

Library Board: Muskoka Lakes Public Library Board

Township: The Township of Muskoka Lakes

Respondent: Any eligible entity submitting a proposal

Successful Respondent / Consultant: The Respondent selected for award

RFP: This Request for Proposals

4. Project Objectives & Focus

The selected Consultant will work with the CEO/Chief Librarian MLPL staff, and the Library Board to complete a Service & Space Review that is evidence-based, practical, and suitable for Board consideration.

4.1 Scope of the Review

The Service & Space Review will include:

- An understanding of current service delivery, demographics, offerings, and space utilization across both branches
- A 3–7 year planning horizon with options and recommendations
- Identification of immediate, practical improvements that can be implemented in the near term
- A primary focus on the Port Carling Branch, with a scaled review of the Bala branch. Consideration of accessibility, demographic forecasts, operational realities, underserviced areas within the Township, and seasonal service pressures.

4.2 Future-Focused Service Planning (Technology and AI)

MLPL is seeking a consultant capable of providing forward-looking, practical

recommendations that reflect the evolving role of public libraries in a rapidly changing technology environment. Proponents should demonstrate an understanding of:

- Shifts in how residents from different demographic groups access information, collections, and programs, including digital-first and hybrid service expectations
- The growing importance of digital inclusion, privacy, and information literacy
- Emerging opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence (AI), including impacts on learning, work, creativity, and misinformation
- How library services, staff capacity, spaces, and technology infrastructure may need to adapt over the next 3–7 years

The Review should include recommendations that help MLPL respond to these trends, including near-term actions and scalable options.

5. Scope and Constraints

- 5.1 Respondents are encouraged to recommend effective and efficient approaches to stakeholder and community engagement while providing meaningful opportunities for public input.
- 5.2 Best practices from comparable Ontario public libraries and rural or seasonal communities should be considered.
- 5.3 All work must align with the MLPL Strategic Plan 2025–2028 and relevant Board policies, and consider the Board’s financial capabilities in their recommendations.
- 5.4 All engagement activities and deliverables must comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and applicable accessibility standards.
- 5.5 Respondents must demonstrate how the project will be delivered within the desired timeframe and may propose enhancements beyond the minimum scope.

6. Work Elements

6.1 Overall Review

The successful proponent will undertake a Service & Space Review with a 3–7 year planning horizon, including recommendations for immediate improvements.

6.2 Project Framework

The project framework is expected to include:

- Review of existing services, usage patterns, space allocation, and background documentation
- Stakeholder and community engagement, including the Library Board, staff, partners, and public input as appropriate
- Analysis of future service and space needs
- Branch-specific space planning and recommendations
- Preparation of draft and final deliverables, including presentations

6.3 Branch Focus

Port Carling Branch – Primary Focus

The consultant will assess the feasibility of reconfiguring, constructing, modernizing, or expanding the Port Carling Branch; evaluate how the current layout supports services; identify space needs; develop high-level concepts; and provide order-of-magnitude cost estimates. Architectural input may be included or recommended.

Bala Branch – Scaled Review

The consultant will complete a scaled review of the Bala Branch to identify opportunities for functional improvements and space optimization, through reconfiguring, constructing, modernizing, or expanding with recommendations appropriate to the branch's size and role.

6.4 Service Area and Satellite Service Review

The consultant will review the historical and current distribution of library branch locations; assess the current service area; consider changing settlement and seasonality patterns; and provide high-level observations regarding potential satellite or alternative service delivery models.

6.5 Additional Approaches

Proponents may propose additional or combined tasks beyond those identified above.

7. Deliverables

At minimum, deliverables will include:

- Project work plan and engagement approach
- Draft Service & Space Review report
- Final Service & Space Review report, including findings, schematics, immediate recommendations, a 3–7 year planning framework, branch-specific recommendations, and an executive summary
- A brief section or appendix addressing technology and AI implications for MLPL
- Presentation or workshop with any or all of MLPL staff, Board, Council, Community Members.

All deliverables must be provided in Word format and accessible PDF.

8. REPORTING

The Consultant will provide electronic copies of all draft, final reports, and schematics in industry standard formats through an agreed upon electronic transfer. Any materials used for presentations, consultations, Council/Committee reports or open houses are to be provided in both hard copy and electronic format as required.

9. RESOURCES

9.1. MLPL staff will assist with logistics, coordination of meetings, and sharing available background information and relevant operational and financial data.

9.2. Engagement sessions may be held in Township or MLPL facilities with the approval of the CEO.

10. PROPOSED FEE

10.1. The Proponent shall submit a detailed fee proposal identifying all costs associated with the proposed work plan that shall not be exceeded without the advanced written permission of The Board or designate.

10.2 Identify any out-of-pocket expenses and disbursements separately.

10.3 Identify any sub-consultants that will be used on the project and include their fees appropriately.

11. TIMING OF THE PROJECT

The following is the proposed timeline for the project. MLPL reserves the right to modify any or all dates and times at its sole discretion.

| Activity/Milestone | Associated Due Date |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| RFP Issued | February 12, 2026 |
| Proposal Closing | March 5, 2026 (5:00PM) |
| Interviews (if required) | Mid-March, 2026 |
| Selection / Award | Mid to Late March 2026 |
| Project Initiation | ASAP following award |
| Draft Report to MLPL | July 15, 2026 |
| Final Report and Deliverables | August 30, 2026 |

12. CONTENT OF PROPOSALS

Respondents must clearly describe their proposed methodology (“how you will do the work”) and deliverables (“what you will provide”), including how findings will be validated and how recommendations will be made actionable.

12.1 The proposal should include the Respondent's interpretation of the project requirements and a clear description of the approach, work plan, and schedule. At minimum, proposals should include:

- 12.1.1** Company overview and relevant experience (library service/space planning, public engagement, facilitation);
- 12.1.2** Key personnel and roles, including identification of a Project Manager;
- 12.1.3** Experience on similar projects (include at least three references);
- 12.1.4** Project understanding and methodology, including how the proponent will develop practical, actionable recommendations;
- 12.1.5** Schedule of work with key milestones and engagement activities;
- 12.1.6** Financial proposal (fees, disbursements, and sub-consultants if applicable);
- 12.1.7** Assumptions, exclusions, and risks; and
- 12.1.8** Any additional information that may assist the evaluation team.
- 12.1.9** Methodology and tools to be used (e.g., engagement formats, data collection, space analysis approach), including accessibility considerations;
- 12.1.10** How the proponent will incorporate future-focused thinking related to technology change and AI into analysis and recommendations.

13. SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

13.1 Proposals must be received electronically by the Closing Date and Time listed on the cover page. Late submissions will not be accepted.

13.2 Proposals shall be delivered by email to: andrew.whitfield@mlpl.ca The bid process is electronic only. Hard copy submissions will not be accepted. All submitted proposals should include **FINAL MLPL RFP 001-2026** in the subject line.

13.3 All submissions shall become the property of MLPL. It is the responsibility of each Respondent to submit all required documents. MLPL is not responsible for a proposal not being received.

14. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION FORMAT

To support an efficient review, Respondents are encouraged to structure proposals using the headings below:

Section 1 – Company Overview
Section 2 – Project Manager & Project Team
Section 3 – Relevant Experience and References
Section 4 – Project Understanding and Work Plan
Section 5 – Schedule of Work
Section 6 – Financial Proposal
Appendices – Additional supporting information (as applicable)

Respondents must include the Respondent's Declaration (Appendix "A") and acknowledge receipt of any addenda (if applicable).

15. QUESTIONS AND INQUIRIES

- Inquiries regarding this RFP are to be directed to the MLPL Project Manager by email – andrew.whitfield@mlpl.ca
- Inquiries must not be directed to other MLPL employees or Library Board members.
- Questions of clarification will be accepted until three (3) business days prior to the closing date, with responses issued to all invited Respondents as an addendum where appropriate.

16. RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

16.1 Addenda: MLPL may issue addenda to correct or clarify this RFP, respond to questions, or amend timelines.

Addenda will be posted on the Library's website

<https://www.muskokalakes.ca/library/about-us/requests-for-proposals-rfp/>

Respondents are responsible for ensuring they have received all addenda and must acknowledge receipt in their submission.

- 16.2** Withdrawal: A Respondent may withdraw a proposal at any time up to the closing time by notifying the Project Manager in writing.
- 16.3** Acceptance/Rejection: MLPL reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to waive informalities, and to accept the proposal that best meets MLPL's needs. The lowest or any proposal will not necessarily be accepted.
- 16.4** Verification: MLPL may verify information provided in proposals, including contacting references.
- 16.5** Solicitation: Any attempt to influence the process through solicitation of MLPL staff or Board members outside of the inquiry process may result in disqualification.

17. PROCUREMENT AUTHORITY

This RFP is issued in accordance with MLPL policy OP-23 – Procurement of Goods and Services. Where applicable, the process is also informed by the Township of Muskoka Lakes procurement framework for invitational competitions.

18. PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

MLPL will not necessarily accept the lowest price of any submission. Proposals will be evaluated to determine the degree to which they respond to the requirements set out in this RFP. Respondents are cautioned that the organization and thoroughness of their submission is critical to the evaluation process.

| Evaluation Criteria | Weight |
|---|--------|
| Understanding of MLPL & Project Objectives | 20% |
| Methodology & Work Plan (incl. engagement approach) | 25% |
| Relevant Experience & Qualifications | 20% |
| Project Team & Capacity | 10% |
| Value for Money (Fees) | 25% |

19. OWNERSHIP

MLPL shall have exclusive ownership rights to all information, reports, documentation, plans, and materials produced as a result of this award. The Successful Respondent may retain copies for its records but shall not release project materials publicly without MLPL's prior written consent, subject to applicable law.

20. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Respondents must ensure they are not in a position that may be perceived as a conflict of interest. Any actual or potential conflict must be disclosed in the proposal.

21. REGULATION COMPLIANCE & ACCESSIBILITY (AODA)

The Successful Respondent shall ensure all services and products provided are in accordance with applicable Municipal, Provincial, and Federal legislation and regulations.

MLPL is committed to providing equal treatment to people with disabilities. All

engagement and deliverables developed for this RFP—including plans, studies, reports, and presentation materials—must be in compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and applicable accessibility standards. The Successful Respondent will ensure appropriate accessibility training for staff assigned to the project and will provide documentation upon request.

22. CONFIDENTIALITY

All records, files, materials, computer programs, data and any other materials belonging to the Library Board and/or Township that may come into the possession or control of the successful Respondent shall at all times remain the property of the Board/Township. Upon expiry, termination of this agreement for any reason and upon written request, the successful Respondent shall immediately delivery to the Board/Township all such property of the Board/Township remaining in its possession or control.

The obligations of this section survive the expiration or termination of this agreement indefinitely.

23. INDEMNIFICATION

The Successful Respondent, its officers, agents or employees and if applicable all sub-contractors shall at all times indemnify and save harmless the Muskoka Lakes Public Library, its board members, officers, employees, servants, agents, and others for whom the MLPL is in law responsible, from and against any and all manner of claims, demands, losses, costs, charges, actions and other proceedings whatsoever made or brought against, suffered by, or imposed on MLPL in respect of any loss, damage or injury to any person or property directly or indirectly arising out of, resulting from, or sustained, as a result of this Agreement, provision of services or any operations connected therewith caused by or resulting from the negligent or willful acts or omissions of the Successful Respondent, its officers, agents or employees or if applicable its sub-contractors.

A Respondent, by submitting a Proposal, agrees it will not claim damages, by any means, in respect to any matter relating to the RFP, the bidding and evaluation process, or any subsequent procurement process resulting from this RFP.

24. INSURANCE

The Successful Respondent shall, at its sole cost, obtain and maintain insurance for the work under this Agreement, including: Comprehensive General Liability Insurance of not less than \$5,000,000 per occurrence naming the Muskoka Lakes Public Library as an additional insured; Non-Owned Automobile Liability Insurance of not less than \$2,000,000; and Professional Liability (Errors and Omissions) Insurance of \$2,000,000 per claim and \$5,000,000 in aggregate, maintained for 12 months following completion of the work and with no retroactive date later than the commencement of services. All policies must be primary, issued by insurers licensed in Ontario, provide 30 days' advance notice of change or cancellation, and have deductibles borne by the Successful Respondent. Proof of insurance must be provided prior to commencing work and upon any policy change, renewal, or amendment. Failure to maintain required coverage entitles MLPL to terminate the Agreement, require immediate proof of coverage, or obtain coverage at the Respondent's expense. These requirements apply equally to any sub-contractors, and the Successful Respondent is responsible for ensuring and confirming their compliance.

25. TERMS OF PAYMENT

The successful Consultant shall be reimbursed on a monthly basis for the actual work completed and time spent on the project. Monthly invoices are to include supporting documentation for all disbursements. Disbursements will be paid at cost. Invoices submitted by the successful Consultant shall include the project title, a description of the work completed and a billing summary. This summary shall include the tasks set forth in the financial submission and shall indicate the budgeted cost, percentage invoiced to date, and a total of these amounts for each task.

25.1 Fee Holdback

The Board will not impose a ten percent (10%) holdback on overall fees until the final acceptance of all deliverables and final reports are made to the board.

26. CONTACT

Inquiries related to RFP can be directed to:

Andrew Whitfield, CEO/Chief Librarian

Muskoka Lakes Public Library
69 Joseph St., P.O. Box 189
Port Carling, Ontario, P0B 1J0

T: 705 765-5650
F: 705-765-0422
E: andrew.whitfield@mlpl.ca
www.mlpl.ca

APPENDIX A

THIS PAGE MUST BE RETURNED AS PART OF THE PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

RESPONDENT'S DECLARATION

The Respondent has carefully examined the conditions attached to this Request for Proposals and is prepared to perform the work as outlined in this document in an expedient, professional, and workmanlike manner.

No person, firm, or corporation, other than the Respondent, has any interest in this proposal or in the proposed services for this RFP.

This proposal is made without any connection, comparison of figures, or arrangements with, or knowledge of any other corporation, firm, or person making a proposal for the same service and is in all respects fair and without collusion or fraud.

The content and requirements of this RFP have been read and understood. All prices are quoted in Canadian funds.

DATED AT _____ THIS _____ DAY OF _____ 2026.

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS: _____

SIGNATURE OF RESPONDENT: _____

NAME/TITLE: _____