

## PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT (2020)

### MACKENZIE PUBLIC LIBRARY

#### INTRODUCTION

The Mackenzie Public Library serves a population of approximately 3700 people, including the McLeod Lake Indian Band and the District of Mackenzie, with the main industries being logging, lumber, market pulp, and tourism. Housed in the District of Mackenzie Recreation Centre, the Library is in the hub of the community, as it is near both of the local schools, and the central Mackenzie Mall. Being in the hub of the community means that the Library is often bustling with community members, visitors, and seasonal workers.

The town and the Library have seen many challenges in last few years. Mackenzie's lumber industry was hit hard by the economic downturn in 2018/2019, but also due to COVID-19 in 2020. Two major mills have gone into indefinite curtailment, with over 400 residents losing their employment. As a result, Mackenzie has seen an exodus of many families from the community. In 2020 the Library had to be flexible and resilient due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as needing to respond the needs of the community in the wake of mill closures.

The Library's Strategic plan's priorities for 2020 included: supporting and developing a literate, resilient, and connected community, increasing our capacity to provide high quality library services, Identifying and reducing barriers to library services, and maintaining our trusted position and positive reputation withing the community.

The following report gives an account of the successes of the Mackenzie Public Library in meeting the 2020 provincial priorities laid out in the B.C.'s Strategic Plan for Public Library Service. These include improving access for patrons, building capacity, advancing citizen engagement, and enhancing governance. In addition, this report describes the outcomes of the Library's technology project funded by the Province of British Columbia's Technology Grant, and discusses how the Library was impacted by and responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### PRIORITY 1

##### *Improving Access for British Columbians*

With over 400 residents losing employment due to mill closures, the Library has become an integral part of the community by providing free wi-fi, access to desktop computers, laptops, printing services, and other technologies. These vital services have aided residents in seeking new employment and have played a critical role in addressing the digital divide as lack of employment has increased financial strains on households, making access to technology at home more difficult.

In 2020, the Mackenzie Public Library made several new technologies available to the community, including two new high-performance computers, two virtual reality systems, iPads, Go Pros, Arduino and Raspberri Pi technology, and several e-readers. In addition, we reduced barriers to information and technology by adding a large collection of audiobooks in DAISY CD format for patrons with print

disabilities, and gave our patrons full access to services provided by the Centre for Equitable Library Access and the National Network for Equitable Library Service.

The addition of high-performance computers and virtual reality has given residents access to a variety of games for fun and educational purposes. This technology was used extensively after its implementation by members of the public on a drop-in basis, as well as by students from the local high school as teachers brought classes of students in to experience various virtual realities that matched up with classroom learning.

Our new collection of e-readers provided greater access to information to the community, as any book that is read on an e-reader can become a large print book, to be read by patrons with print disabilities. In addition, lending out e-readers gave patrons access to the many e-books available so that they were not limited to what was available in a print.

The Library continued to offer various other technologies to the community in 2020, such as access to e-books, e-audiobooks, and audio CDs.

## PRIORITY 2

### *Building Capacity*

In 2020, the Library focused largely on building capacity through seeking funds for computers and technology that would be integral to meeting the community's needs in 2020 and going forward. Mainly, this consisted of building two high-performance computers for patrons to use. The community will be able to use these computers in a plethora of ways that a regular PC will not allow such as for using virtual reality tools, and sound and video editing. The benefits of these computers to the community will be vast, from fostering creativity and innovation to supporting digital literacy and digital inclusion.

## PRIORITY 3

### *Advancing Citizen Engagement*

To build a stronger relationship between the Library and the McLeod Lake Indian band, and work towards lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, in 2020, the Library sought out and gifted grant funds to the McLeod Lake Indian Band to assist them in renovating a space for their new library. In addition, we purchased and gifted the entire collection of youth and adult First Nations Communities Reads books for their new library, while also purchasing the same collection for our collection.

In 2020, the Library worked with the local seniors centre and the Post Office, as we donated our weeded books to them for their fundraisers. These partnerships helped to create stronger relationships with community members and fostered social inclusion.

Another way that the Library advanced citizen engagement was by having youth and adult volunteers work together to create and build the high-capacity computers from scratch.

In February we held out 4<sup>th</sup> annual Book Slam event. This event advanced citizen engagement throughout the community as we worked with the Recreation Centre staff and management to use the Recreation Centre as the venue, had community members volunteer at the event, and had businesses in the community donate items or cash to the silent auction. This is a popular and highly anticipated annual event in Mackenzie, and many community members enjoy being a part of this fundraiser.

#### PRIORITY 4

##### *Enhancing governance*

In 2020, the Library experienced the challenge of having three separate Directors throughout the year, as well as a modest turnover of Board members. Despite these challenges, the Library continued to have a strong governance model, with Board members working closely with the Director to propel the best interests of the Library. The new directors worked closely with the North Central Library Federation, and the Association of British Columbia Public Library Directors, and attended many workshops and meetings, in order to set a strong foundation upon which to enhance governance at Mackenzie Public Library going forward.

#### SUMMARY

The Library faced many challenges in 2020 from managing the COVID-19 pandemic, to having a high turnover of Directors. Despite these challenges, the Library was able to continue to meet and exceed the community's expectations. We secured funding that resulted in many new technologies and resources that the community will be able to utilize going forward, we developed strong relationships with community members and the McLeod Lake Indian band, and we continued to have effective governance. The Library staff, Directors, and Board members had to be flexible and creative in 2020, and work together to come up with solutions to the many challenges that arose. Moving into 2021, we are stronger and more capable than ever before, and we will continue to be a vital part of the community.

#### ADDITIONAL REPORTING FOR 2020

##### COVID-19 AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The Library closed its doors to the public on March 17<sup>th</sup> and reopened on June 29<sup>th</sup>. Despite the closure, most staff continued to work in the Library and were able to successfully run the 2020 Summer Reading Club. This was done by circulating 'take-away bags' filled with weekly crafts, games and activities, and providing online content, in place of in-person library programs. Dozens of children participated in the weekly program 161 times over the summer. As well, while the Library was closed, we provided curb side pick-up and drop-off for library materials.

During the closure, a COVID-19 safety plan was created to keep staff and patrons safe and to ensure that government safety protocols were being met. Some of the changes that were enacted to keep staff and

patrons safe, included adding plexi-glass dividers between workstations and at the front service counters, having staff disinfect surfaces in the Library throughout their shifts, providing hand sanitizing stations for staff and patrons, positing various safety signage throughout the Library, directing the flow of foot traffic, setting capacity limits, quarantining returned items, inacting PPE protocols, removing some of the seating and, and disinfecting computer stations between use. These changes meant it was necessary to educate staff and patrons frequently to keep everyone abreast of the new protocols. In addition, throughout the year, it was necessary to be able to adapt quickly as new government restrictions and rules were enacted, monitor and change certain protocols to best meet the needs of our staff and patrons, and frequently field and respond to questions and concerns from staff and patrons.

While all of our in-person programs came to a halt in March, we started to add or alter programs that were 'COVID safe' upon re-opening to the public. For example, in November, we resumed our pre-school storytime program but with fewer participants allowed in each group to allow for social distancing. To make up for the smaller groups, we ran the storytime more times per week than we did pre-COVID-19. As well, to make up for our school-aged craft time not running, we started adding some passive programming in the Library, that school-aged kids could do while social distancing. In addition, the virtual reality drop-in program became wildly popular with the school-aged crowd towards the end of 2020.

Meeting the protocols set out in the COVID-19 Safety Plan, has meant that staff and management have had to shoulder an increased workload. This, coupled with individual's anxiety regarding the virus, has meant that the staff's mental health is at the forefront of managements concerns.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges. It has meant that we had to be flexible and adaptable and be able to field and respond to concerns from staff and public frequently, all while managing our own mental health, with an increased workload. Despite the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought, the Library was able to meet and exceeds the needs of the community and continue to provide the community with vital information and services.

#### LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT - FINAL REPORT

The technology grant project's results were positive and far-reaching within our community. For this project, the Library recruited school-aged and adult volunteers who were either interested in learning how to build a high-capacity computer or were interested in teaching others how to build a high-capacity computer. This team of volunteers met regularly at the Library as they worked together to create a plan, order the parts, and to build the computers. We also purchased two virtual reality gaming systems with this grant to be used alongside the high-capacity computers. This project directly helped to deliver several of the provincial strategic goals for public libraries.

Citizens from the community came together to collaborate and share their knowledge with one another as they worked towards a common goal. This citizen engagement fostered social inclusion amongst the participants and gave the young volunteers an opportunity to learn new skills.

The addition of two new high-capacity computers meant that this project helped to deliver the provincial strategic goal for public libraries to improve access for British Columbians. These computers have given our community greater access to information and services than they had prior to the addition of these computers, as patrons may use these computers as a regular PC functions, or they may use them in ways that a regular PC will not allow such as for using virtual reality tools, and sound and video editing.

The Library was able to help deliver the provincial strategic goal for public libraries to build capacity in public libraries by investing in technology that would be integral to ensuring our patrons information and service needs would be met not only in 2020 but into the next few years as well. With computers quickly becoming outdated over time, we recognize that it is necessary to frequently purchase up to date technology so that the library continues to be able to meet the needs of our patrons. This technology also ensures that the Library is doing everything it can to address the digital divide in our rural town.

Overall, the addition of the two high-capacity computers and virtual reality gaming systems to the Library have been overwhelmingly positive and have impacted many of the residents in various ways. Not only did this project directly help to deliver several of the Province's strategic goals for public libraries, but it also was incredibly meaningful to be able to give young people the opportunity to learn new skills.

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: MACKENZIE DISTRICT LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: \$9,800

Area of Need	Outcome	Metrics	Strategic Links	Actions	Collaborative Links	Timeframe	Project Budget	In-Kind/Leveraged funds	Comments
Educational VR platform	Build and operate one or more VR platforms	Public usage of the platform(s)	Education	Build and operate one or more VR platforms	Local Highschool, Local youth center	Implementation in 2020; use ongoing	\$9,800 +/- \$2,000	\$2,000 (additional grant)	
Technology Programming	Implement additional technology related library programs	Public usage of equipment / attendance of programs	Education, programming	Plan and run additional technology related library programs in areas of computer building, coding, computer programming, robotics, virtual reality, video editing, and graphic design	Local Highschool, Local youth center	Implementation in 2020; use ongoing	\$2,250 +/- \$2,000	\$4,250 (additional grants and subsidies)	
Assistive Technology	Circulate eReaders as an assistive technology	Public usage of equipment / feedback of partner organizations	Serving marginalized communities	Circulate eReaders as an assistive technology	Local Senior’s center, local health facility	Implementation in 2020; use ongoing	\$4,000	\$4,000 (additional grant)	