PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANTS REPORT (PLGR) 2020

PENDER ISLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AND ASSOCIATED READING CENTERS

INTRODUCTION

The Pender Island Public Library Association (PIPLA) and associated reading centers are situated in beautiful southwestern coastal BC, in the archipelago of the Southern Gulf Islands (SGI) electoral area administered by the Capital Regional District. Located between BC's two major city centers, Vancouver and Victoria, the local population and activities in our region are greatly influenced by seasonal visitation from urban centers. The SGI electoral area has ca. 4,735 registered residents (Census Canada 2016), with Pender Island having the largest population of ca. 2,300 full time residents. Our region is typical of resort areas, with a small residential population and a doubling of population numbers during summer months due to an influx of part-time residents and tourism-based visitors. For a public library, fluctuating visitation levels present a challenge of meeting the needs of two main types of patrons, "locals" and "visitors", and adjusting to seasonal periods of high and low library usage. For example, locals expect regular library hours, updated physical and digital collections, and community-based programming. Visitors might expect access to high speed internet connectivity and public computer workstations, and borrowing materials with their home library card (BC One Card program).

The demographics of our area encompass an older population of mainly retired and semi-retired people. The median age is 62.6 years (the most popular age), compared to the BC median age of 45.5 years. Most households (>85%) in our region are one or two-person in size, and this is reflected in a low number of families with young children: ca. 350 youth (0-18 yrs. old) live in our region. Our library programs, services, online resources, and facility design generally match the age range of the local population. Notably, working people in our region earn a lower median income, 25% less than the provincial average, primarily due to seasonal tourism and service-based employment. The primary language spoken in our region is English, with 10% of residents also speaking French. Only 2.5% of our residents indicate an Aboriginal identity, and 3% of residents identify themselves as a visible minority. During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, seasonal visitation dropped considerably, although real estate sales and new construction increased. With continued population growth expected, our libraries are preparing for increasing usage and changing needs.

PIPLA pursued many goals laid out in our Strategic Plan (2019-2023), with the main priorities focusing on personnel, administration, financial management, library services, community connections, and the library facility. In this second year of the Plan, we renewed focused on updating library policies and vision/mission statements, developing partnerships with community groups, expanding staffing, and

developing strategies for Board, staff, and library volunteer development and succession. Extraordinary measures to adjust to COVID-19 operating guidelines required staff and Board Trustees to re-focus efforts on new projects not included in the Strategic Plan. PIPLA is the administrative lead library in our Southern Gulf Islands area, and shares staff and library resources with neighbouring reading centers located on of Mayne, Galiano, Saturna, and Piers islands.

PRIORITY 1 - IMPROVING ACCESS

In 2020, provincial funding was used by PIPLA to improve access to both physical and digital library resources throughout our region. Our rural island communities face intermittent internet service and lack of high speed connectivity. Our libraries remained focused on providing access to reliable internet access and updated and secure public computer workstations. In 2020, libraries on Pender and Saturna islands were refurbished with new commercial-grade Wi-Fi routers to increase the range & strength of signal and the number of concurrent users. The goal was to meet the growing needs of people who use our libraries as a reliable Wi-Fi hub. The outcome was consistent use of our free Wi-Fi with fewer dropped Wi-Fi connections (reduced by estimated 20%) and more patrons with personal devices using Wi-Fi at our libraries. This allowed people to better access a wide range of online information including government forms (i.e. employment, pension, taxation, ICBC), licenses, student exams, and to stay connected with current events. During a temporary library facility closure due to COVID-19, we increased our digital collections of eBooks, eAudiobooks, and eMagazines, with a resulting 15% increase in digital materials borrowed over 2019.

PRIORITY 2 - DEVELOPING SKILLS

One area we focused on developing skills in 2020 was regarding staffing, by creating new employment opportunities and offering professional development for current staff. Supported by our Electoral Area Director, we created two new job positions which developed the skills of young workers. New Library Assistant positions were created at Pender and Mayne libraries and were filled with local candidates who received job training in library services and COVID Workplace safety operating guidelines. Our libraries were able to re-open and expand library hours to the public with the newly staffed positions, offering much needed services during the pandemic. Funding was also provided for staff and Board Trustees to develop skills by attending online educational webinars in various areas (homelessness and libraries, assessing library collection diversity, design software for online content, BC Library Trustee Assoc. webinars). The outcome was forging professional networks and gaining experience in areas including library trends and innovation, Board development, and staff skill sets.

PRIORITY 3 – ENHANCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

In our strategic plan 2019-2023, PIPLA identified that forging stronger partnerships with local residents and organizations was a main strategic priority. Due to COVID restrictions in 2020, we were unable to invite as many people into the library space, but did embark in pursuing online connections. We greatly

expanded our online presence through digital media posts allowing for quick announcements to library followers on revised open hours and times. New online resources and additional content were posted to the library website, resulting in 12% more website visits over 2019. Some of our programs were switched to online format, with the Galiano reading centre engaging local authors to participate in book readings via a new library YouTube channel. Multiple author readings were recorded and posted, allowing people to connect with both books and authors in their local community. With the popular Summer Reading Club being offered online only, we were unable to collaborate with local youth groups and community storytellers as usual, but our outreach reading program was still enjoyed by many kids and families. The outcome of our online presence was continued connections with local residents and a rich variety of resources that library users could access from home. A great impact we had on library patrons in 2020 was by engaging them in regular conversations in-person, on social media, by phone or by email, exchanging knowledge on the pandemic and local concerns, and participating in mental wellness and social connectivity in our community.

PRIORITY 4 - ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

Governance continued to be a major theme for our library in 2020 with the PIPL Board of Trustees undergoing revisions in Board culture pertaining to library management. We began by completing a full revision and approval of both Governance and Operational policies, clearly allocating responsibilities between Trustees and staff. The Board then embarked on reflective and creative sessions to develop new mission and vision statements that identify the core values and goals of our organization. Our Board Development Committee led Trustees and the Library Director on a Board Governance Workshop for a full day with a BCLTA facilitator that focused governance work, emerging trends, and a shared understanding of what makes the Board an effective team. Outcomes from the workshop will be reinforced through the demonstrated behaviour of the Trustees, the leadership of the Chair, and the support of the Library Director, becoming a sustained and enduring part of Board culture and work. Our focus in 2020 also included a sustainable approach to Board recruitment. In 2021, these revisions will take time to be fully understood, tested, and implemented, allowing Trustees to have focused committee work and for staff to have an increased opportunities for decision-making pertaining to daily operations. Our common goal is to deliver the best library services possible to our community.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING FOR 2020

TECHNOLOGY GRANT – INTERIM REPORT

We were very appreciative of the Library Technology Grant received in 2020 as it enabled us to pursue much needed baseline projects. We are focusing on three areas for the grant funds: broadband connectivity, digital services equipment, and digital services access. We have completed refurbishing 2 of 5 libraries with new commercial-grade Wi-Fi routers to increase the broadband range & strength of signal and the number of concurrent users. These upgrades will meet the growing needs of people who use our libraries as a reliable Wi-Fi hub. Included in the work is upgrading Wi-Fi privacy features including user disclaimer acceptance forms at log-in. For digital services equipment upgrades, due to travel and workplace restrictions during COVID-19, 7 of 15 public computer workstations located in our

5 facilities have received the upgrade. The upgrade includes installation of security features through enhanced privacy software, protecting users from identity theft and protecting computers from malicious downloads. Having consistent security software on public computers in all our library facilities will simplify maintenance, renewals, future upgrades, and troubleshooting. Increasing access to digital services is ongoing as we research affordable online database subscriptions. Planning was started to purchase a subscription to online digital newspapers (Canadian and/or international news media), accessible (free) to all library cardholders from home, providing free access to high quality and factual e-newspapers & articles. By providing high quality online resources, our goal is to keep local islanders connected to current events, which is particularly relevant during the COVID pandemic.

COVID-19 AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The library services provided by PIPLA and associated reading centres were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with every aspect of our services touched in some way. Our greatest strength was our staff and Board members who showed leadership, integrity, and resourcefulness to adapt to rapidly changing provincial health guidelines. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all my staff and Board members for their hard work and support to forge ahead providing library services to our small island communities during 2020, a year that has taken a toll on everyone's daily lives. Due to our resourcefulness, we maneuvered to first close our facilities to the public, ensured staff working conditions were safe, and then enhanced our online collections and resources. Communication was key in connecting with library users, primarily through online media and outreach. By June we were ready to offer facility re-opening with restricted entry, or curb-side pick-up, or both, and services slowly expanded throughout the rest of 2020. Feedback from patrons was overwhelmingly positive as some normal routine of library use resumed and circulation, public computer use, and social connections were restored. The financial cost of equipping our libraries with safety measures (Plexiglas, hand sanitizing stations, signage, new front circulation desk, etc.) was significant (ca. $5K) and these expenses were covered using contingency and reserve funds. One aspect that the pandemic highlighted was a lack in centralized planning for our 5 library facilities in emergency situations, leading to repetition in safety plans, policies, and procedures. Many of our library volunteers chose to stop or reduce volunteering to serve the public, which placed a significant additional workload on existing staff and Board members. Moving forward, our group of libraries may form an ad-hoc committee to evaluate our foundational operating model that has been used for 20+yrs., with the goal of ensuring that we position our libraries to provide consistent and modern library services for years to come.

SUMMARY

Provincial funding received in 2020 made a significant difference in the daily operations of our small rural libraries within the Southern Gulf Islands. As our area draws from a small tax base for funding library services, provincial grants have a big impact on our ability to provide far-reaching and accessible library services. Staffing remains a great challenge for PIPLA and associated reading centers, and future

plans may include more centralized library administration and expanding staffing at each library facility. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that people (staff, Board members, and all workers) are our greatest asset, and our facilities need a solid workforce to respond to rapidly changing safety guidelines and library services. Finding new approaches to staffing is ongoing and we are researching and developing contingency plans to ensure the delivery of high quality library services in the future.

Prepared by Carmen Oleskevich, Library Director
Pender Island Public Library & Southern Gulf Islands Community Libraries

Library staff and new COVID-19 safety equipment installation at the Pender Island Public Library (June 2020).

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM:

PENDER ISLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

Oct. 15, 2020

We were very appreciative of receiving the 2020 Library Technology Grant, as the goals of expanding digital services, upgrading technical equipment, and improving Wi-Fi connectivity have been top priorities for our library and associated reading centers. Our region, the Southern Gulf Islands, is a rural and geographically isolated part of BC with historically poor internet services and low broadband connectivity. In comparison, our library and reading centres have seen patron use of digital services continuously grow over the past 5 years, with increases in Wi-Fi usage, borrowing of digital materials such as eBooks and eAudiobooks, and accessing online resources. The use of our public computer kiosks have been very popular, filling the needs of those with an insufficient number or no personal devices or internet services for their families in their homes. Our rural libraries have often been the sole central hubs providing internet services for our island communities. With patron demands increasing, changes in technology, and more services going online, our library has struggled to keep up with the growing needs of patrons.

The 2020 Library Technology Grant will be used to fill a real need and allow the Pender Is. Library and associated reading centres to tackle several top priority projects. The funds will be prioritized among 3 projects that will focus on enhancing digital services, tech equipment, and broadband connectivity. For improving broadband connectivity, the focus will be on upgrading current equipment to increase range, signal strength, concurrent users, and data collection, to meet the growing usage by islanders/visitors who use our libraries as a reliable Wi-Fi hub. To improve digital services, we are planning 2 projects: addressing public computer security system upgrades to protect sensitive user information from identity theft, and providing additional online resources including e-newspapers to keep our islanders connected to current events, particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. For full details, please see the attached chart.

We have started planning and moving forward on projects using funds from the 2020 Library Technology Grant, allowing our rural Southern Gulf Islands communities to be more equitably served by digital resources.

Submitted by,

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2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: PENDER ISLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: $10,740

Area of Need	Outcome	Metrics	Strategic Links	Actions	Collaborative Links	Timeframe	Project Budget	In-Kind/Leveraged funds	Comments
Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.) **Connectivity upgrade – new routers to improve speed and quality of public Wi-Fi**	Improved connectivity helps reduce barriers to digital inclusion and equity for those patrons who rely on the library for internet access.	Wi-Fi usage increases due to reliability. Number of dropped Wi-Fi connections is reduced.	Reliable public connectivity supports the provincial strategic priority to improve access for British Columbians.	Engage technical contractor to assist with project. Purchase new routers and cabling. Determine optimum installation points.	Work with contractor for technical advice and installation	Begin planning October 2020. Installation of new equipment in 5 facilities by June 2021.	$5,000	Funds from the Capital Regional District, Southern Gulf Islands Library Commission to cover 3 staff costs for all planning and implementation stages.	
Patron software upgrades **Upgrade public computer security systems to protect users**	Reliable computer security systems protects users and improves access to online services.	The opportunity for malicious digital acts such as identity theft are reduced. The safety of users' private information is greatly enhanced.	Reliable public connectivity supports the provincial strategic priority to improve access for British Columbians.	Purchase security software licenses and install on 15 public computer workstations in 5 library facilities.	Build on existing knowledge base to provide consistent security software for 1 library and 4 reading centres.	Planning completed by September 2020. Purchase licenses and installation by June 2021.	$4,000	Funds from the Capital Regional District, Southern Gulf Islands Library Commission to cover 3 staff costs for all planning and implementation stages.	
Digital programming **Expand subscriptions to online databases**	Greater access to accurate online materials provides people with tools to improve their daily lives.	More choices for online library resources are made available, for free.	Equitable access to online materials improves the lives of British Columbians.	Research e-newspapers through BC Libraries Cooperative and purchase annual subscription	Work with the BC Libraries Cooperative to leverage the licensed databases	Research completed by Dec. 2020. Subscription purchased for Jan. 2021.	$1,740	Funds from the Capital Regional District, Southern Gulf Islands Library Commission to cover 3 staff costs for all planning and implementation stages.	