

PROVINCIAL LIBRARY GRANTS REPORT 2020

WHISTLER PUBLIC LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

Incorporated in September of 1975, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) was the first resort municipality in Canada. With a population of just over 12,000 permanent residents, 15,000 employees and 2.7 million average annual visitors (equating to an average daily population of 30,000), Whistler is one of the more unique communities in BC. As one of the top ski resorts in the world, Whistler's economy, built on adventure and hospitality, contributes over 25% to BC's tourism export revenue.

Since 1986, the Whistler Public library has evolved and adapted with the unique challenges presented by supporting a vibrant and resilient tourism economy. In our [2018-21 strategic plan](#), we honor our core local and temporary service population by acknowledging that the library is an integral part of maintaining a healthy and resilient community. We recognize that the library becomes a different place depending on the needs and identities of the people who use it and that the library can impact people's sense of belonging in our community.

In a community experiencing growth, housing challenges, and increasing cost of living, the library is one of Whistler's most accessible amenities, and as one former mayor put it, "one of the strongest investments in affordability the Council has ever made". We deliver services people count on by connecting people with one another, information, and technology. In addition, the library and its services contribute to building a strong, sustainable economy by connecting people with employment, being inclusive, fostering diversity, and laying the foundation for informal learning and personal growth. We contribute to a vibrant local economy by recruiting and retaining professional and proficient staff, contracting vendors, and adding vitality for local businesses in proximity to our facility.

As with most individuals, communities, and businesses, 2020 will be indelibly etched into our collective memory as the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still ongoing today, the pandemic has impacted every aspect of our community due to the economy's heavy reliance on tourism and the international destination traveler. This experience has played out in paradoxical extremes; the pandemic has unified our community during a time demanding physical distance, while simultaneously impacting livelihoods when the very things that fuel our economy – tourism and travel – pose a potential threat to our well-being.

The following report presents an overview of a few of the Whistler Public Library's 2020 initiatives as they relate to service adaptation during this pandemic year. Some of these initiatives align with our 2020 goals, all of which also align with the goals set forth in our 2018-2021 strategic plan, and the Resort Municipality of Whistler's Community Priorities:

- Play well with others: *Community – Participation, Partnerships*
- Make life better: *Community - Quality of Life, Inclusive, Connected, Conduct*
- Be an inspiration: *Tourism-Based Economy - Resilient, Experience, Dependence, Local, Renewal*

- Make an impact: *Sense of Place - Culture, Landscape, Balance, Vibrant*
- Be green: *Environment - Respect, Protection, Access, Resources, Climate*

PRIORITY 1 - IMPROVING ACCESS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS

Library Goal that supports the priority: Make life better: *Community - Quality of Life, Inclusive, Connected, Conduct*

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority: **Building Virtual for the New Reality**

On March 16, 2020, Justin Trudeau reached out to Canadians asking them to “stay home”; on that day, we joined our local government, business community, and schools by heeding the call to action and closing the library facility. This by no means meant that we had ceased providing service, and in the days that followed the library’s management, marketing, and programming team began mobilizing to shift the library’s website to a 24/7 virtual branch to better showcase our online offerings, provide updates on impacted library services, and promote our new lineup of virtual programs.

We made the addition of a blog to our homepage and tutorials on how to use our online resources. While visits to our website are down by 35% when compared to March and April of last year, the Download menu on our website saw a 182% increase in visits to our ebooks and audiobooks page, 97% increase for our magazine and newspapers page, and a 68% increase for music and films page. Our Learn menu saw a 228% increase in visits to our online courses page and 21% increase for our language learning page.

From March 15 onward, the shared BC Overdrive collection of ebooks and downloadable audiobooks showed a 35% increase in average daily checkouts, 20% increase in the number of holds, and 170% increase in the average number of new users per day. For approximately the same time period, we saw a local increase of 13% for ebooks and 18% for audiobooks. To reduce wait times for Whistler patrons on hold for titles in the shared collection, we purchased Whistler-specific copies. We also increased the amount of money that we contributed annually to the shared collection by 20%.

For the rest of our premier online resources, we saw an increase in use when compared to March and April of the previous year of 57% for Lynda.com, 13% for Press Reader, 17% for RBDigital Magazines and an outstanding 116% for RBDigital Audiobooks, 15% for Mango Languages, and 15% for Hoopla.

We actively posted on our Facebook page in order to keep our community informed about COVID-19 related support, online activities from our local arts and culture community, thank yous to our local service providers, and recommendations about our online resources and virtual programs. In the month following the facility closure, our post engagement (the number of reactions, comments, shares, and clicks) went up by 307%!

After a few weeks of exploring technology options and brainstorming with facilitators, we began experimenting with virtual programming in April 2020, moving some of our most popular programs onto Zoom or Facebook. One of our greatest successes has been our Community Book Club, which has seen larger and more consistent attendance in the virtual realm than it ever has in person! We now have over 40 people on the monthly mailing list for this program, with members from as far away as Montreal and Los Angeles joining us each month.

PRIORITY 2 – BUILDING CAPACITY

Library Goal that supports the priority: Be an inspiration: *Tourism-Based Economy - Resilient, Experience, Dependence, Local, Renewal*

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority: From Service First to Health & Safety First

As with all libraries, reinventing the way we serve the public during the pandemic occupied most of our time and energy from March until November of 2020. The easy part of the restoration of services was identifying our phases and the indicators that would help us to determine the movement from one phase to another, but the difficulty came with the lack of substantiated (and in some cases, conflicting) scientific evidence alongside vague safety recommendations given to us by public health. In response, we leaned toward a source of certainty: the protocols required by WorkSafe. Out of an abundance of caution, and with the hierarchy of controls in mind, we prepared a “take-out” service model that would work with our unique facility and staffing limitations.

On June 1, we launched *Library to Go* contactless holds pick up service. Patrons were able to visit the library on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to pick up their holds after being contacted by staff. Their holds were already checked out to their accounts with extended due dates and left in the lobby in paper bags in alphabetical order by last name for self-serve pick up. Patrons were greeted by a library staff member outside of building, who explained the safety procedures and verified that there was a bag ready for pick up before the patron entered the lobby. At this time, we also made staff available by email seven days a week and by phone on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to provide assistance with searching, placing holds, and recommending items patrons might like.

During the month of June, staff packed over 700 bags, filling over 1600 holds. The process was slow and labour-intensive and our demand backlog was significant. With the public so accustomed to a high level of concierge-style service, these tense, safety-centric interactions along with the general inefficiency was a difficult pill for the team to swallow. This feedback from a kind patron lifted our spirits and reminded us that we were still delivering value: “I have no doubt you are all working very hard. A new world calls for new routines and we appreciate all that the library has done throughout this with the continued programming and figuring out how to get books out to the public again. We appreciate it greatly! Thank you!”

Over the summer, we were able to add more *Library to Go* services as additional staff returned from their redeployed roles. This included extending our contactless hold pick-up hours to include additional days and evening hours and offering staff-initiated printing, photocopying, and scanning, as well as in-person library card sign-up and personalized reading recommendations.

By the fall, we were ready to recall our remaining redeployed staff to launch *30-Minute Express Visits* on October 26. In this phase of restoration of service, we welcomed patrons back into our building for the first time since March. To make this happen, our team implemented a number of new safety measures, including physical barriers, occupancy limits, mandatory mask use, the reconfiguration of our collection and computer lab to create space for social distancing, and the removal of all seating. The services that *Express Visits* restored included browsing the collection, self holds pick up and check out, computer access, and an increase in service points to reduce wait times.

PRIORITY 3 – ENHANCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Library Goal that supports the priority: Make an impact: *Sense of Place - Culture, Landscape, Balance, Vibrant*

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority: **We're Right Where You Need Us**

So much of what we have learned through the pandemic experience relates to our ability to adapt and respond to changing requirements. Following the library facility closure, our Library Director was seconded to assist with the municipal EOC to provide support to social service providers. One of her first assignments was to attend a board meeting of the Whistler Community Services Society (WCSS). One of the main issues the board was trying to tackle was growing food insecurity in our community and the doubling demand for food bank service. To make matters worse, due to funding concerns, WCSS was forced to temporarily lay off staff. This left their organization in a challenging position: they had to maintain service levels in the face of increased demand, and they no longer had the person-power or physical space to meet the community's needs. Our Director realized that we could help WCSS: our staff, who are knowledgeable and experienced with serving vulnerable populations, were uniquely positioned to fill the person-power gap. Along with six library staff members who joined the foodbank team, the library also supplied technology to support the foodbank registration process.

Not long after the foodbank redeployment, Whistler began to be inundated in parks and outdoor spaces by day trippers. Visitors looking to escape their urban environments flocked to the parks and quickly overloaded capacity. Bylaw, Parks, and Recreation needed additional support in the form of Park Ambassadors to help provide directions, information, and COVID protocol reminders in outdoor spaces. With the overloaded capacity there was also the need for additional parks sanitation staffing. Again, our staff were able to step into these necessary and valuable roles to support the safety and wellbeing of the community.

As mentioned above, our team members – those of us providing library services and our redeployed staff – were well equipped to handle challenging interactions while still embodying both our local and organizational culture. Prior to the pandemic, our team received ongoing training on and utilized Ryan Dowd’s empathy-driven approach to solving problems and preventing conflict. Dowd is the Executive Director of Hesed House, a large homeless shelter outside of Chicago. While the core training focuses on serving individuals experiencing homelessness, the human psychology and tools that are taught can be used with anyone but especially with those experiencing trauma. As a result, this training was an essential support for our redeployed staff in particular.

Dowd offers shorter monthly sessions, including the invaluable “How to Deal with Problem Behaviours related to COVID-19”. This session guided our team’s approach to how we implemented the safety measures necessary to reopen the building to the public. Our team used this training to prevent issues by modeling all of the behaviour we expected, eliminating any rules that we weren’t enforcing, using hard barriers such as removing furniture rather than roping it off, and keeping our signage simple and short. This session also taught our team a three-step strategy for addressing non-compliance with regards to our required safety procedures, which allowed for a smooth transition when the RMOW Council endorsed a mandatory mask policy for all municipal buildings on October 26.

PRIORITY 4 - ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

Library Goal that supports the priority: Be an inspiration: *Tourism-Based Economy - Resilient, Experience, Dependence, Local, Renewal*

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority: Strengthening Board Governance

At the end of 2019, the Whistler Public Library Board of Trustees, in collaboration with the Library Director, decided to take steps to increase board member engagement and expand knowledge by improving the annual onboarding process with the addition of a board retreat. In prior years, orientation had grown to include a tour of the library with the library’s senior management team and a comprehensive presentation delivered by the Director, Chair, and head of the HR and Governance Committee. With a goal of strengthening board governance, the focus of this broadened onboarding experience would be to ensure that trustees are continuously well-oriented to their roles and that of the Library Director; that the Board's orientation process would continually improve to meet the needs of its trustees; and, that the Board would have the tools they need to represent the library in the Whistler community, BC, and beyond.

On January 8, 2020 Scott Hargrove, CEO of the Fraser Valley Regional Libraries, presented a half-day retreat to the Board, focusing on technology and social trends, the impact of such trends on library services and design, along with the all-important foundational knowledge of library values and effective governance. Sharing this integral information early on in the year provided an essential framework for early goal-setting, along with ensuring trustees had the tools necessary to hit the ground running in their governance role.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING FOR 2020

TECHNOLOGY GRANT – FINAL REPORT

With the desire to continue meeting the growing digital needs of our population, and continue on our path to *Inspire Wonder* in new and exciting ways, we began 2020 by working toward the previously identified goal of shifting public computing services from desktop-based computing to laptop-based computing. This decision, spurred by the goal of providing a more flexible computing experience for our patrons while also open up space within the library to create a Technology Lab, led our work in the initial months of 2020.

The full extent of the global pandemic was soon realized, and with that came a change in priorities that both accelerated and decelerated our technology initiatives planned for the aforementioned fiscal year. A set of twelve laptops, purchased in 2019, set us up to be able to continuously offer public computing services as we re-opened our doors to the public, an opportunity that would have been a difficult proposition with desktop-based computing services. Further, the pandemic offered a unique opportunity to fast track the initial trialing phase of our public laptops, allowing us to offer laptop-based computing to the public months ahead of schedule.

The purchase of a locker from D-Tech International, designed to securely store and loan laptops, and generously funded in part by the Province of British Columbia's Technology Grant, was made in late 2020 to further support the shift to laptop-based public computing. However, due to supply chain constraints in the United States as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the receipt of this purchase has been delayed until March 2021, further delaying the full roll-out of laptop-based public computing at the Whistler Public Library.

COVID-19 AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

WPL Restoration of Service Journey

How do you deliver indoor service during a pandemic when your business model is a cross between a retail space with thousands of touchpoints (and everything gets returned), a community centre where people come together, shelter for the most vulnerable in our community, a hub where people work and study all day, a bar with no tab and a creative commons where there are crafts, discussions, stories and singing? Add to that, our library is one of the busiest per capita in the province and sitting in a high traffic zone, and is also, oddly enough, an attraction for many visitors to the resort.

- March – In the first week of closure we mobilized our professional team to work remotely and adapt our website to highlight our e-resources and shift programming to virtual. Most library staff were redeployed to other roles at this time: food bank, parks sanitation, and parks ambassadors.
- April – Some staff returned to the building, book drops were closed, and staff began working through materials quarantine and backlog of returns, materials processing, and annual reporting to the province. Remaining staff were assigned to augment service for the virtual branch. Plans began for phased restoration of services and facility safety plans.

- May – Continued work on backlog and detailed planning for Library To Go Launch
- June – Library To Go holds pick up service launched and we started bringing staff back from redeployment to build out library services support to catch up on the returns and holds backlog. Opened the book drops 24/7.
- July – Printing, copying, and scanning. New materials, extended hours, and Summer Reading Clubs and craft bags for kids. Staff-curated picks and Grab and Go. Pick up by appointment.
- August – Interlibrary loan and holds from regional libraries, computer use soft-launch and window shopping.
- September – Additional hours and planning for next phase as tourism declined. Ended quarantine of materials.
- October to present – Express Visits introduced 30-minute browsing and borrowing and computer use; additional services will be restored as the pandemic environment allows.

SUMMARY

In summary, 2020 was a year of vast challenge, constant adaptation, and unprecedented uncertainty. Upon reflection, the team is proud of the organizational robustness that we have been able to achieve thanks to the tools and practices put in place to maintain predictability and coherence in our culture while delivering upon our vision and strategic priorities. Throughout this experience the principles of Agile, our team agreements, and our service values have been a reliable framework for decision-making as well as the lens through which we view our work.

One of the most difficult aspects of 2020 was the prioritization of health and safety over our commitment to service; ironically, we were given the opportunity to celebrate our service reputation when we received the Whistler Chamber of Commerce Award for Service Excellence in the category of Best Service in a Large Business. After a number of nominations, the team greatly appreciated the recognition, particularly for a non-profit organization that over the years competed alongside some of Whistler's top hotels and restaurants.

Finally, one of the more significant and difficult decisions of 2020 was the pausing of the capital projects related to our 2017 vision survey and phased space changes. While we were able to make modifications to the library shelving to better retail our growing Deweyless collection early in the facility closure, we willingly chose to pause further capital spending to off-set the significant loss of revenue to the resort during the first months of the shut-down. While this was a difficult decision, it made sense that we would need to focus our energy on the operational planning and changes in service delivery required by the circumstances. As we move through 2021, we will continue to turn our focus to sustaining operations in our current framework and phasing in additional services until we see a new normal on the horizon.

2020 Whistler Public Library

INTERIM PLANNING REPORT

PROJECT OVERVIEW & RATIONALE

Since 2018 the Whistler Public Library has been in the process of working through phased space need changes resulting from the library's 2017 Vision Survey. In preparation for the Library's 2018-21 strategic plan the Vision Survey represented pivotal public engagement that has helped the library evolve and build upon two of our greatest assets; Space and Technology.

Public contributions to the vision survey along with additional stakeholder consultation resulted in a 2018 Space Needs Assessment proposing prudent, but high-impact changes to the library space in collaboration with HCMA architects. One of the most valuable changes highlighted through this process was the desire for more flexibility with library technology and the need for high end shared resource technology to support youth and adult learners, entrepreneurs and individuals within the community. As a result it was proposed that the peripheralised desktop technology in the library's traditional computer lab would sunset and be replaced laptops which would give patrons the opportunity to utilize this important technology anywhere in the library. In addition, the removal of the desktop computers would mean that the former computer lab could be transformed into a technology makerspace, aptly named the "WonderLAB" after the library's vision to Inspire Wonder.

Through the generous support of this provincial technology grant and money fundraised by the Friends of the Whistler Public Library and the Board of Trustees, the Whistler Public Library will be able to build technology capacity to safely house, maintain and distribute up to 12 laptops anywhere in the library offering patrons better spaces and opportunities for comfort, privacy and collaboration.

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: WHISTLER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: \$13,525

Area of Need	Outcome	Metrics	Strategic Links	Actions	Collaborative Links	Timeframe	Project Budget	In-Kind/Leveraged funds	Comments
Patron hardware upgrades (public computers, printers, etc.) Laptop vending	Greater patron autonomy, comfort and privacy in the use of public computing technology in the library.	Measurable increased positive patron feedback with the library space as it relates to technology use within the space and the technology itself.	This project “Builds Library Capacity” by offering patrons flexibility, but also freeing the space traditionally used in desktop computing to offer a technology makerspace to our community.	12 Laptops purchased, laptop user-stories, configuration and testing by staff and the public, laptop vending technology purchased, installation and testing. Staff training and communications plan prior to roll-out.	Funding partnership with the Friends of the Whistler Public Library.	December 2019- Laptops purchased; Fall 2019 user-stories and software list; Spring 2020 initial configuration and testing by staff; Summer 2020 public testing; Fall 2020 Vending technology purchase and order; December 2020 vending installation and testing; Winter 2021 public launch	\$62,000 (includes laptops, software licenses and vending locker)	\$46,500 from the library capital reserve (monies fundraised by the Friends and Board of Trustees)	