

PROVINCIAL LIBRARY GRANTS REPORT 2019

WHISTLER PUBLIC LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

Incorporated in September of 1975, the Resort Municipality of Whistler 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.

The following report presents an overview of a few of the Whistler Public Library's 2019 initiatives and their value to our community and stakeholders. These include enhancing the resort experience through educational and entertaining programming, making an impact with staff who are knowledgeable and confident, building partnerships that maximize impact and using data to drive conversations about library value. These initiatives align with our 2019 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: *Partnering for success*
- Make life better: *Enrich community life*
- Be an inspiration: *Enhance the resort experience*
- Make an impact: *Ensure economic viability*
- Be green: *Protecting the environment*

STRATEGY 1: IMPROVING ACCESS

Library Goal that supports the priority:

The provincial strategy of improving access is supported by the Whistler Public Library's strategic priority to be an inspiration. Our strategic plan says, "We *enhance the resort experience* so locals, newcomers and visitors alike can access a trove of inspiring and informative resources. We believe in educational and entertaining programming for all ages."

Programs and/or Services that align with the priority: Barbed Choir and Whistler Children's Chorus

Barbed Choir is a local pop-up choir for adults that began at The Point Artist-Run Centre in 2016, co-lead by our Program Coordinator, Jeanette Bruce, and guitarist Laura Nedelak. In 2017, Jeanette suggested that Barbed Choir become a Library program as a way to increase access to the group financially and geographically: the singers attending would no longer have to pay for each session, and the Library would serve as a more central location for meetings. The group now meets at the Library in the fall and winter and at The Point (as a Library Outreach program) during the summer. We have also developed an annual partnership with Arts Whistler, in which our final Barbed Choir meeting of the year is held in their 200-seat theatre and a band is hired to accompany the choir.

The Whistler Children's Chorus (WCC) is a long-standing non-profit organization that has been connecting children in our community with music theory and performance skills since 1991. In 2018, founder and outgoing Artistic Director Alison Hunter approached the Library to suggest that a partnership between our organizations could serve our community by increasing access to the program. As was the case with Barbed Choir, this improved access would be two-fold: families wishing to participate would no longer have to pay for their child to sing with WCC; and, given our physical location in the heart of the Village, it would be easy for children to get to rehearsal after school. The beginning of this partnership coincided with Jeanette Bruce taking over as Artistic Director of WCC.

We use music as a literacy tool in many of our programs for infants, toddlers, and pre-school aged children, but until we added WCC and Barbed Choir to our program line-up, we had no way of offering musical literacy to older audiences. Our local schools do not offer music as part of their curriculum, so unless families are able to afford private lessons, children in Whistler are not being exposed to music in an educational context. Whistler Children's Chorus can provide that opportunity, potentially sparking a life-long passion for music. Similarly, in a community where sport is by far the dominant pass-time for adults, Barbed Choir offers a novel, judgement- and barrier-free creative outlet.

Partnerships that support the priority:

Whistler Children's Chorus, The Point Artist-Run Centre, Arts Whistler

Outcomes that were identified:

22 local children from grades one through five were enrolled in Whistler Children's Chorus in 2019. An average of 15 adults participated at each biweekly Barbed Choir session of 2019, with 86 people attending our year-end Holiday Singapalooza. With the addition of these two programs, we have used staff expertise to diversify our program offerings for two age groups (school-aged children and adults), and provided access to a type of literacy development that may be unavailable elsewhere in the community.

STRATEGY 2: DEVELOPING SKILLS

Library Goal that supports the priority:

The provincial strategy of developing skills is supported by the Whistler Public Library's strategic goal to "make life better: *we enrich community life* by creating a safe, comfortable, dynamic environment. We strive for a place that is ideal for kids, parents, students, entrepreneurs, readers, and dreamers alike to plug in or tune out".

Programs and/or Services that aligns with the priority:

The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness training

To achieve our strategic goal to make life better, we have been actively working to create a space that is inspiring, functional, and adaptable to the needs of our visitors. As a vibrant and busy community hub, our space is used in many varied, and often competing, ways. One example would be the need for both quiet and loud spaces in the same open-concept building. As a result, our team has been working on our conflict resolution skills and have completed a training course based on Ryan J. Dowd's book "The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness: An Empathy-Driven Approach to Solving Problems, Preventing Conflict, and Serving Everyone," published by the American Library Association. Dowd is the Executive Director of a large homeless shelter near Chicago and he has trained organizations, such as libraries, homeless shelters, and hospitals, on how to use empathy-driven enforcement tools to gain voluntary compliance when problem behaviours arise.

While the training provided our team with a deeper understanding of what it means to experience homelessness, the tools that we learned are useful for building better relationships and more effectively resolving conflict with anyone who visits or uses our library.

Outcomes that were identified:

One of the outcomes of developing better conflict resolution skills is that all staff now recognize the power they have to resolve problem behaviours; they also demonstrate greater confidence when doing so. Another outcome is that our team is better able to create a more compassionate and inclusive space for all of our visitors, but particularly for our patrons who are experiencing homelessness. One of our staff included the following note in her 2019 performance and development plan:

The "Librarian's Guide to Homelessness" was so good and I look forward to continuing the training. The first session had a profound effect on me, altering the way I see homelessness.

Lastly, by using tools that focus on building relationships and use empathy instead of punishment, we have been better able to gain voluntary compliance when there is a code of conduct violation or conflict amongst patrons, which means that our team is handling fewer volatile situations. This outcome has led to the additional benefit of improved staff safety, since it is now part of our routine to bring a second person to provide backup any time there is a conflict to resolve.

STRATEGY 3: COLLABORATING ON SHARED GOALS

Library Goal that supports the priority:

The provincial strategy of collaborating on shared goals is supported by the Whistler Public Library strategic goal to "Play well with others: we believe in *partnering for success*, extending our reach and maximizing our impact through building and nurturing mutually beneficial relationships." In 2019, the partnerships that best demonstrate our commitment to this priority also fulfill one of our other goals, which is to make inclusiveness visible.

Programs and/or Services that aligns with the priority: Alphabet Soup

Alphabet Soup is our monthly drop-in diversity club for LGBTQ+ individuals, their friends, family, and allies. The intention of the group is to hold space and create an opportunity to make friends and build community while sharing resources, ideas, successes, and challenges. Alphabet Soup was started by the Whistler Youth Centre, and was initially created to help a teen who was struggling. When Whistler Public Library became a partner, the program was moved to our community room space and became part of our teen programming line-up. Later, it was changed to an all-ages program in an effort to bring together a larger number of community members, and around this time, the Whistler Community Services Society came on board as a partner. At the start of 2019, the three partners met to discuss strategies for making this program a more effective community- and connection-building event, and several changes were made: the location of the monthly drop-in meeting was moved to the Pangea Pod Hotel, a local business that was also hosting an LGBTQ+ night at the same time; a new type of program was added called “Alphabet Soup Presents,” in which the partners take turns hosting a special event in addition to the drop-in (ex. movie nights, mini golf, art programs); and the Whistler Blackcomb Mountain Alliance came on board as a new partner.

Partnerships that support the priority:

Whistler Public Library staff work with staff members from the Whistler Youth Centre, Whistler Community Services Society, and the Whistler Blackcomb Mountain Alliance. In addition, we have partnered with Whistler Pride & Ski Festival and OutTV for an annual film screening during the festival.

Outcomes that were identified:

The outcome of this new partnership of four committed community groups and the new structure of the program is that we saw consistently higher numbers of attendees to Alphabet Soup programs in 2019. In 2018, we had a total of 88 attendees at Alphabet Soup programs, and in 2019 we had approximately 300 total attendees. At Whistler Public Library we were able to host topical film screenings (including additional partnerships with OutTV and Whistler Pride), an author visit with Tanya Boteju, and an incredibly well attended and received Drag Queen Storytime. This partnership has taken a program that was created to respond to the needs of one teen and built it up to meet the needs of a community. It not only fits the strategic priorities of partnering for success and making inclusiveness visible, but also clearly aligns with Whistler Public Library’s purpose: we are at our best when we create opportunities for discovery and connection.

STRATEGY 4: ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

Library Goal that supports the priority:

The provincial strategy of Sustaining our Success: enhancing governance and demonstrating impact correlates directly with the Whistler Public Library’s strategic priorities of “maximizing our impact,” “enhancing the resort experience so locals, newcomers, and visitors alike can access a trove of inspiring and informative resources,” and “growing our capacity for shared resources.”

Programs and/or Services that aligns with the priority: [Library 2018 Annual Report](#) (Published in August 2019)

2019 marked a significant change in the Whistler Public Library's annual reporting. Building on the framework created by the 2018-21 strategic plan, the library streamlined the annual report to reflect our commitment to Agile principles: celebrating simplicity, using data to drive decisions, and delivering value. A 2018 Annual Statistics and ROI narrative report derived from pivotal points in the annual statistics reporting provided the foundational information for analyzing trends, highlighting areas of growth and identifying downturns. This information was gathered and distilled with the intent of helping library leadership to identify patterns and set goals in alignment the library's current strategic priorities and correlating projects. Along with the data analysis, the team drew inspiration from the Fairfax County Public Library's ROI (Return on Investment) Business Case and the American Library Association Value Calculator. The value calculator is a tool that can be used by individuals or families to estimate how much they save by using their libraries; in the case of our annual reporting, we used this tool to assess an entire community, as we input the Whistler Public Library's total usage statistics for 2018. This reporting was then integrated into the 2018 Annual Report to show how the library delivers value to the community and visitors through a variety of resources and services.

Partnerships that support the priority:

Buy-in from the library Board of Trustees was essential in supporting this change to our style of reporting.

Outcomes that were identified:

The ROI tool provided a framework for highlighting library impact in terms that were easily relatable to our public and local government. With a budget of just over \$1.5 million in 2018, the ROI calculator helped us to show a net return of more than \$6 million dollars to library patrons. That is, for every one dollar invested in the Whistler Public Library in 2018, library users received \$3.80 in return.

Implementing the use of the ROI calculator enabled library stakeholders to see the value delivered by different materials and services by the library. As an example, 63,491 circulations of adult books represents a return on investment of \$1,269,820 for our community, and reference services (33,924 questions answered in 2018) amounted to \$576,708 in value.

It is worth noting that the very idea of an ROI calculator for library services has been periodically challenged on the basis that the true impact of public libraries cannot be "valuated." However, the metrics the calculator provides are helpful for seeing how these valuable taxpayer dollars and donations pay dividends to our community.

LIBRARIES IN ACTION – SUCCESS STORIES FROM B.C.'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

While we are very proud of the accomplishments detailed above, some of our most successful initiatives do not directly relate to provincial goals. In 2019, the library made great strides toward delivering upon several key initiatives worth highlighting:

- Improved health and safety practices through critical incident training, evacuation training, a work alone administrative procedure, and a dedicated Library Health & Safety staff committee. Notable outcomes have been increased safety inspections and integration of health and safety best practices into day-to-day operations.
- Implementation of Phase 2 of the Library Space Needs changes, which resulted in more collaborative work space and increased dedicated quiet study spaces. The most notable outcome has been unprecedented use of these new spaces, revealing that there were likely people leaving the library because of the lack of space for study and collaboration prior to these additions.

- Continued improvement upon our strategic goal to “make inclusiveness visible,” which included improvements to the library facility’s accessibility features, updated welcome signage and restroom signage honoring all individuals and groups, in-depth reconciliation education for the public and staff through the [Indigenous Canada MOOC](#), and Cultural Diversity & Inclusion training for staff and the public. Notable outcomes have been feedback on how meaningful it is to see signage that welcomes everyone and how responsive we have been to lower barriers to accessibility.

SUMMARY

Looking back on 2019, we celebrate initiatives that increased program accessibility, developed the team, fostered collaboration and improved our ability to share library impact. These accomplishments, along with significant capital space changes, improved health & safety, green initiatives, making inclusiveness visible, technology training, and STEAM additions to youth programming, comprised the lion share of our year, but should not eclipse our organizational investment in some of the lower-cost, higher-impact “soft skills”. The library team walked away again with several community honours, including the Whistler Chamber of Commerce’s Most Stoked Award; yet another Chamber Excellence Award nomination for Best Service in a Large Business; and the nomination of Library Program & Marketing Coordinator, Jeanette Bruce, as a Whistler Chamber “Rising Star”.

In addition to this recognition from the Whistler business community, the library was fortunate to be highlighted a part of a feature article in the August 29 edition of Pique Newsmagazine. The article, titled [“Turning The Page: Libraries in Whistler and Beyond Adapt To The Shifting Needs Of An Adapting Society”](#), and a corresponding editorial, [“A love letter to the library”](#), paint a picture of the role of the modern library in the community, and in particular, recognize Whistler Public Library for supporting a sense of belonging in a community where it can be challenging to create connections. It was an honour for our work to be profiled in such a visible way and a great opportunity to celebrate the immense amount of change effort put forth by the team over the last eight years to reach the point where we are now. We are grateful to the support we receive from the Library Board and the Municipality to continue to elevate the employee experience and create a motivating ecosystem where a happy and engaged group of people promote a happy and engaged service experience.