



Provincial Library Grants Report 2020

Introduction

About Us:

[Vancouver Island Regional Library \(VIRL\)](#), which opened its doors in 1936 as the Vancouver Island Union Library, is now the fifth largest library system in British Columbia, and serves over 450,000 people on Vancouver Island over 42,000 square kilometers, through 39 branch libraries, our eLibrary, and a Books-by-Mail service.



Vancouver Island Regional Library Provincial Library Grants Report 2020

Our 39 locations are important gathering places in our communities. Since 2011, VIRL has opened 18 newly built, renovated or refurbished branches to better serve our customers' needs. These branches serve our largest communities (Nanaimo) and some of our smallest (Sayward and Woss), with more construction projects planned. In every project we undertake, we assess the needs of each community through detailed analysis and public consultations to ensure we are providing spaces that will suit our communities for many years to come.

VIRL's service area, membership demographics, and size:

- Service area size: 42,000 square kilometers
- Population served: 457,000
- Membership demographics:
 - 10% Children
 - 6% Teens
 - 83% Adults



Challenges We Face

Many of our branches are at the frontline of economic and social struggles in our communities. 2020 saw the added challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March we suspended all in-branch services to the public in response to Provincial Health Authority orders and recommendations. We developed a recovery and reopening plan in the weeks that followed and began to safely reopen our spaces in June and July 2020. VIRL is committed to being open and accessible, while still providing a safe and welcoming space for everyone. To that end, we have been gradually reopening our spaces and increasing access to services and resources while adhering to stringent health & safety protocols in line with BC CDC and WorkSafe BC. Prior to COVID-19, we were aware of many in our communities increasingly facing issues such as poverty, substance use, homelessness, dementia, social isolation, and mobility restrictions. COVID-19 has compounded these existing issues. VIRL is committed to finding avenues to support those in need, while ensuring that staff and library customers feel safe and welcome in our branches or via online engagement. We continue to strive to provide information, vital resources for families and newcomers, resources that support new business enterprises, and safe ways to stay connected to our marginalized or isolated community members in person and virtually.

To safely and successfully recover and reopen, VIRL recognizes that it needs to support its staff (and ultimately the library customers) by investing in training for our staff to ensure they have the tools to deliver the safest services possible to our communities. In 2020, staff participated in nearly 2,800 hours of training. Common topics of learning last year included tools for



supporting a diverse customer base, communication, supervisory skills, technology skills, and health and safety resource material.

VIRL's Strategic Plan

2020 was the fifth and final year of VIRL's [Strategic Plan](#) (2016 – 2020), "Your Voice, Your Library". The Strategic Plan is the foundational document that guides our Board, staff, and community towards accomplishing our Mission, Vision, and Values. Due to COVID-19, plans to engage in community consultation and planning for our next Strategic Plan were put on hold. The Library Board supported extending our current plan by two years, until 2022.

Mission

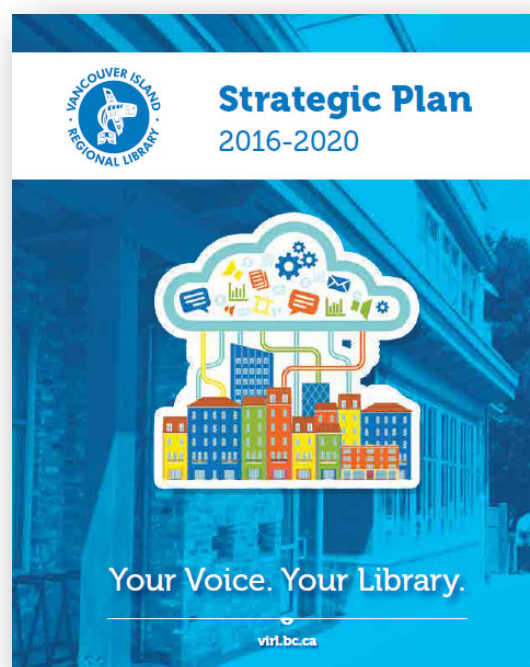
To enrich lives and communities through universal access to knowledge, lifelong learning, and literacy.

Vision

To develop strong library branches that are vital community destinations for knowledge, inspiration, innovation, and renewal.

Values

- Leadership and Innovation
- Stewardship and Accountability
- Information and Literacy
- Intellectual Freedom
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Tradition and Technology



The Strategic Plan is built around four key principles:

- **Principle 1:** Community
- **Principle 2:** Collect. Connect. Collaborate. Create.
- **Principle 3:** Places & Space
- **Principle 4:** Life at Work

Since 2016, VIRL has embarked on a series of projects and strategic initiatives that have set the foundation for our future direction. The following initiatives in 2020 demonstrate our continued work toward achieving VIRL's strategic goals.

Principle 1: Community

VIRL commits to engaging and listening to our diverse populations. In 2020, we shifted the way we engage with our communities through increased online programming, events, and workshops. We partnered with community volunteers to teach, inform, and entertain those isolated at home. We created a venue for our members to share with each other. Some of these great initiatives include:

Reader of the Week

[Reader of the Week](#) videos available through VIRL's YouTube Channel showcase local celebrities or avid library users from communities all over Vancouver Island who loves books, eBooks, audiobooks, or the library itself. Participants answer questions about their favourite childhood book, current reads, what the library means to them, and more.



Celebrity interviews include: world-renowned Canadian First Nations artist Roy Henry Vickers, Canadian poet and children's writer Susan Musgrave, and Sheila Malcolmson, Member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

Weekly interviews started airing in September 2020.

Storytime Corner Facebook Group

Two storytimes and one babytime are posted each for members of this online group. To date, more than 550 people have registered.

Virtual Book Clubs

VIRL staff host three online book clubs with over 240 members across the island. These book clubs meet via a Facebook Group to discuss the chosen book for the month.

Virtual Summer Reading Club

Nearly 1,000 children registered for the [2020 Summer Reading Club \(SRC\) online](#), 400 joined our SRC Facebook Group, with participation spanning the entire VIRL service area, from Port Hardy to Sidney/North Saanich - and we did it all completely online.

Online events included:

- a high-energy kick-off event with the Kerplunks
- a Q&A with astronomer Rachel Wang
- howling along with Gary Allan's wolves

- an author interview with the Tankards and storytimes
- A Q&A with Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jenny Sidey-Gibbons and Dr. Jay Cullen
- an amazing wrap-up performance by Rick Scott, one of Canada's best loved children's performers

Principle 2: Collect. Connect. Collaborate. Create.

A key component of the VIRL Strategic Plan is to spark imagination and collaboration by providing access to new technology and opportunities to create content.

During the past year amidst COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings, our reliance on technology increased exponentially. VIRL was well positioned to respond to greater virtual, digital, and technology needs in our communities.

In 2019, we launched the new and improved Creativity Commons space in Nanaimo. To ensure that VIRL stays relevant in an era of constant technological and digital changes, the Creativity Commons acts as VIRL's tech incubator to test out new technologies, resources, and the best way to offer these services to communities throughout the island. During COVID-19 the staff in Creativity Commons were leaders in creating new ways to connect, create, and collaborate.

Creativity Commons Initiatives in 2020:

- Creation of an internal Virtual Services page for staff resources and info sharing.
- Professional development for staff, related to technology and video recording.
- Purchase of additional video editing software and recording equipment for staff.
- Changes to the website and events calendar to make finding virtual programs easier.
- Creation of online STEAM learning workshops for our customers.
- 3D printing available by request for curbside pickup.
- Book printing for curbside pick up
- eSports events
- Virtual tournaments



Alone but Not Alone Poetry in Isolation

The Creativity Commons staff put out a call to people across the island asking them to send in their poetry to combat the feelings of isolation at the onset of COVID-19 restrictions. Over 40 poets submitted their work to create the *Alone but Not Alone Poetry in Isolation* anthology that was then printed by our book printing machine in Creativity Commons.

Principle 3: Places and Spaces

VIRL understands that our branches are key gathering places in our communities, big and small. We are leading the way in providing flexible spaces in our most remote communities, with our recent new build in the community of Woss, which opened in December 2020.

The creation of a new section of our website called [VIRL@HOME](#) has been instrumental in connecting with our communities virtually. Branches closed for part of 2020 due to COVID-19 and reopened with limited capacity and services in the last half of 2020, making the creation of a place online to gather and connect a priority.

Principle 4: Life at Work

VIRL knows that to be successful, staff need support, training, and development. In 2020, VIRL staff completed nearly 2,800 hours of training. Common topics of learning last year included tools for supporting a diverse customers base, communication, supervisory skills, technology skills, and health and safety resource material.

During Library Month in October, we focused on celebrating our staff with a “Stronger Than Ever” campaign. We featured staff on our Intranet, launched a new Employee Recognition Program, shouted to the world that we are Stronger Than Ever with our billboards, social media posts and e-newsletter, and connected ourselves branch-to-branch through our ongoing button campaign.



Provincial Priorities

Priority 1 - Improving Access

VIRL's 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan, "Your Voice, Your Library" includes multiple goals for improving access to resources, programs, and spaces that align with this provincial priority:

How we did it in 2020:

- Detailed Recovery and Reopening Plan providing access to services and resources safely and gradually, following BC CDC guidelines.
- Launch of the new VIRL@HOME section of our website with easy links to online programs, events, and workshops.
- Expansion of our digital resources adding unlimited copies of eBooks and audiobooks on a wide selection of popular titles.
- Online card registration was introduced in early 2020 to allow for easy and safe access to online resources while our branches were closed. We have maintained this method of registration.
- Two newly built library branches were opened in 2020. One in Chemainus in January 2020 and the other in Woss, in December 2020. These new branches have the latest in technology offerings, refreshed collections, and welcoming and accessible spaces.
- Partnership with Nanaimo Art Gallery and the Nanaimo Museum to offer VIRL cardholders a 50 percent discount for their first-year art gallery and museum membership.



Outcomes:

- The Recovery and Reopening plan has created a safe path toward access and engagement with community members. Safely allowing access to resources and services has been gradual and methodical.
- The expansion of digital resources and the creation of new online content and interactive events has provided easier access to digital content and created a sense of community and connection online.
- Online card registration has made membership and access to resources easier and safer.
- The partnerships with the Art Gallery and the Museum have provided crucial support to important cultural institutions while improving access to arts, history, and culture.
- The two newly built branches have provided a much needed increase to library space and resources for those communities.

Outputs:

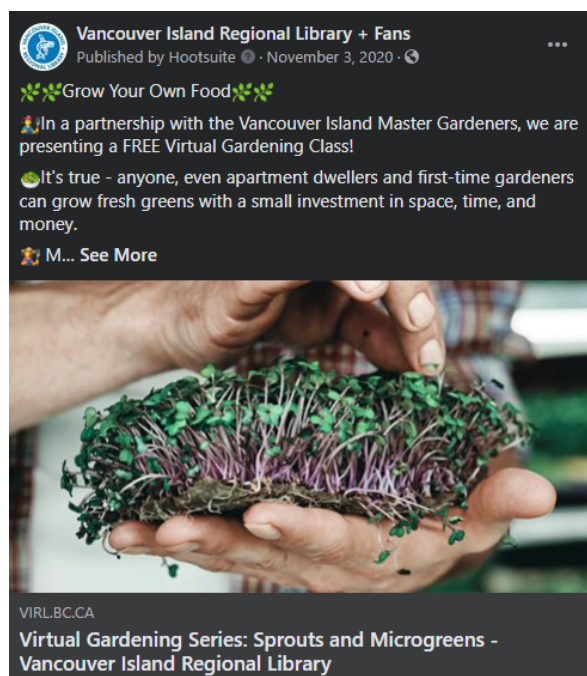
- In January 2020, more than a 1,000 people visited the new Chemainus branch in its first two days of opening. There were 6,000 book checkouts in the first month. By comparison, the Chemainus branch had just under 3,000 checkouts in January 2019. More than 200 people signed up for library cards in the first 60 days after opening.
- We had just over 12,000 new memberships in 2020.
- The increase in digital resources in 2020 saw an increase over 2019 in the following:
 - 44% increase in audiobook circulation
 - 55% increase in eBook circulation
 - 23% increase in the use of streaming movies and TV
 - 42% increase in the use of digital newspapers and magazines

Priority 2 – Building Capacity

Excellence in programming and collections (both print and digital) build capacity in our communities by providing information and training that contribute to a more knowledgeable and connected society. Principle #2 of VIRL's 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan, "Your Voice, Your Library" is: Collect. Connect. Collaborate. Create. This principle addresses the knowledge and skill development needs of our communities.

How we did it:

- Delivered quality programming to all ages online via our YouTube channel, Facebook page, and website.
- Professional Development and learning opportunities for staff in areas of communication, supporting a diverse customers base, supervisory skills, technology skills, and health and safety.
- Virtual technology training and assistance to our customers through videos and workshops on our YouTube channel.
- Virtual programs about gardening, baking, and STEAM projects.
- Increases to digital and physical collection budgets to ensure new items are continuously available.
- VIRL purchased an All Access Pass to the Education Institute (EI) so that staff can participate in any live EI webinar and access recordings of all past webinars - for free, anytime, anywhere.



Outcomes:

- Online programming and training videos have engaged those looking for connection and inspiration during a difficult year.
- Continued investment into our physical collection ensures there is always something new to read and enjoy.
- Increased access to digital learning, collections, and information as new content was added.

Outputs:

- Over 900 programs were offered in 2020, many of them virtually.
- Over 1300 online classes were completed using a library card.
- Nearly 2,800 hours of staff training was completed.

Priority 3 – Advancing Citizen Engagement

Developing and maintaining strong relationships is fundamental to moving libraries' shared strategies forward. These partnership opportunities allow us to connect with our communities, listen to the perspectives of traditionally marginalized groups, and show that the library is a vibrant, welcoming place for people of all socio-economic groups, cultures, and literacy levels.

How we did it in 2020:

- Indigenous Voices Program: In 2019 we expanded the Indigenous Voices program to offer a wider range of programs such as author's readings, discussion groups, book clubs, language sessions and Indigenous movie nights, to name a few. We had plans to expand this program in 2020, unfortunately many plans had to be postponed.
- *Alone but Not Alone Poetry in Isolation* poetry anthology
- Online communities were created via YouTube and Facebook pages to engage in discussion and sharing with anyone who was interested.

Outcomes:

- Indigenous Voices program won the 2020 American Library Association (ALA) Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects.
- *Alone but Not Alone Poetry in Isolation* - The Creativity Commons staff put out a call to people across the island asking them to send in their poetry to combat the feelings of isolation at the onset of COVID-19 restrictions.
- [Reader of the Week](#) showcasing local celebrities or avid library users from communities all over Vancouver Island who loves books, eBooks, audiobooks, or the library itself.
- Storytime Corner Facebook Group posts two storytimes and one babytime each week for members of this online group.

Outputs:

- Over 40 poets submitted their work to create the *Alone but Not Alone Poetry in Isolation* anthology that was then printed by our book printing machine in Creativity Commons.
- Since the Reader of the Week program began in September, more than 20 readers have been featured.
- To date, more than 550 people have registered for our Storytime Corner Facebook Group.

Priority 4 – Enhancing Governance

VIRL is committed to measurement frameworks that continually collect, analyze, and report on the initiatives we undertake. This ensures accountability and informed decision making.

How we did it in 2020:

- Continued quarterly reporting of performance metrics to the Board of Trustees.
- Creation of a comprehensive Recovery and Reopening Plan for a phased approach to restoring access and service in our branches.
- Online surveys were conducted throughout the year to gather feedback from our communities regarding branch hours for newly built branches, collection use feedback, and general customer feedback.
- Adjusted internal work plans to prioritize safety, branch reopening, and the shift to virtual services.

Outcomes:

- Quarterly results were communicated to VIRL's Board of Trustees, and provided management with the information to prioritize system-wide initiatives and campaigns to address areas in need of improvement.
- We gathered valuable feedback from our communities regarding hours of service for new branches and refurbishments that informed our service hours.
- Feedback gathered on technology needs is being put into a digital strategy to guide our initiatives going forward.
- Engaged staff at all levels working on projects and initiatives that move us toward reopening VIRL branches and resuming services.

Outputs:

- The Recovery and Reopening Plan was implemented in May 2020 leading to the safe and gradual opening of all 39 branch locations with varying levels of service.
- Two new branches were opened in 2020 with increased open hours, increased staffing, and additional space to meet community needs.

Summary

Whether working to promote literacy in all its forms, increasing access for families to vital library services, ensuring that our branches are equipped with the latest digital innovations and learning opportunities, working to advance reconciliation, or providing spaces for quiet contemplation and human connections, the common element is a commitment to community. The provincial funding we receive helps us create vibrant, engaging spaces and resources that evolve with our customers. Looking ahead, we hope to continue to empower our communities as creators, connectors, and leaders. We look forward to our ongoing partnership with the province and all the great things we can accomplish together.

Technology Grant – Final Report

The final report is attached.

COVID-19 and Public Libraries

Video: Our Path Ahead



Impact:

- In-branch services temporarily suspended in March 2020 with gradual reopening that includes limited in-person service, based on occupancy restrictions.
- Shift priority to online services and digital resources.

Vancouver Island Regional Library Provincial Library Grants Report 2020

- In depth risk assessments and safety analysis for all 39 locations before reopening and at each stage of the phased reopening plan.
- Assessment and reconfiguration of branch spaces.
- Concerns from community about timeframe for the resumption of library services.

Response:

- Recovery and Reopening Plan created.
- Recovery Task Force made up of staff from all levels of service to plan health & safety protocols for curbside service.
- Gradual increase of services through a phased approach.
- Each adjustment and increase to service is done in conjunction with the phased reopening plan and per Provincial Health Authority guidelines.
- Increase janitorial contracts in all 39 locations.
- Purchase of PPE, Plexiglas, hand sanitizer, and reconfiguration of branch spaces.
- Staff training on new health and safety protocols.
- Online membership registration implemented.
- Increased digital resources.
- Staff training to produce high quality videos for online engagement.
- Consistent messaging emphasizing our commitment to health and safety as our number one priority.
- Ensuring staff received daily updates, ranging from safety messages to opportunities to socialize and connect.



Challenges:

- Assessment of physical facilities in the early days of the pandemic across our expansive service area and with travel restrictions in place meant that preparing branches for reopening took longer than anticipated.
- Training staff on new health and safety protocols for safely working in branch spaces and delivering service to customers was done in phases.
- There wasn't a "one size fits all" approach to reopening given our diverse communities and branch sizes. Some locations had community-specific restrictions in place, and some branches were in shared buildings that weren't reopening at the same time we wanted to reopen.
- Keeping staff connected, informed, and engaged throughout a lot of change and uncertainty.
- Meeting customer expectations for service while balancing safety protocols.

Innovation:

- Staff have found many innovative ways to connect with our communities and provide resources, entertainment, education, and a sense of community:
 - Grab and Go bags – offered at many locations, these have been very popular as they provide an assortment of items of a particular theme. This reduces the time

Vancouver Island Regional Library

Provincial Library Grants Report 2020

people need to spend browsing in the space, and introduces people to new items and subject areas they may not have found otherwise.

- Online events have meant that anyone in our service area can attend an author reading or live performance that would otherwise have been location specific if presented in-person.
- Online gardening workshops have connected people all over the island and allowed for partnerships that have, in the past, been very location specific.
- Give Library: This annual campaign sees gift wrapped library cards given away at branches as stocking stuffers. This year, we partnered with local businesses to help promote both the program and the businesses themselves.
- A Virtual Services Strategy has been developed to grow this area of service.
- Touchless features are now a priority when designing new spaces.
- Collaborating with local community foundations to access \$56,516 in recovery grants, VIRL purchased equipment for 26 local care homes, ensuring that residents have access to technology, internet, and were provided with library support to access our digital collections and programs.

Emerging Trends:

- Increased use across digital resources shows the need for increased investment in this area of our collection.
- The inclusiveness of online programming options for those in remote locations shows the need to continue this method of programming post pandemic. A Virtual Services strategy has been created to grow this area in years to come.
- The digital divide already existed in some of our remote and aging communities and this has grown during the pandemic. Ensuring we can serve and connect with those not able to participate digitally is an ongoing focus.

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: VANCOUVER ISLAND REGIONAL LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: \$ 43,061

Area of Need	Outcome	Metrics	Strategic Links	Actions	Collaborative Links	Timeframe	Project Budget	In-Kind/Leveraged funds	Comments
Electronic collections (licensing)	Children and adults have inspiration and tools to complete crafting programs	Number of people accessing the platform between June and December 2020.	Providing creative educational resources for library staff and teachers supports the provincial goal of building capacity.	Trial evaluation, followed by licensing and marketing this new resource.	VIRL will be sharing access to CreativeBug with local schools and teachers through ShareEDBC.	Trial for staff and public feedback: May 2020 Licenced product and public launch: June 2020	\$5,600	VIRL will allocate internal funds to continue this subscription in 2021 and 2022 at a cost of USD \$11,200 each year.	This work is complete, we are now monitoring its success. These numbers will be reported in our annual Provincial Grant Report.
Electronic collections (licensing)	Reduced wait times for popular eBooks and eAudiobooks.	Average number of days to wait for a requested eLibrary title	Increasing the number of copies of popular ebooks and eAudiobooks supports the provincial priority of improving access for British Columbians.	Funds were used to purchase copies of eBook and eAudiobooks with high holds lists, with a priority on unlimited simultaneous use titles. This targeted spending will reduce customer wait times.	VIRL is not eligible to purchase OverDrive content through the BC Libraries Cooperative	Purchased additional copies April through June 2020.	\$22,620	VIRL allocated \$224,122 toward eBook content in 2020. In May 2020, VIRL re-allocated \$72,433 funds to its digital collection budget to boost spending during the pandemic. The provincial grant funds will supplement our in-house spending, bringing the total to \$319,175.	In March 2020, VIRL customers waited an average of 44 days for their eBooks/ eAudiobooks. For the remainder of 2020, this reduced to an average of 41 days, through targeted spending on simultaneous use titles. Usage increased by 50% over 2019.
Electronic collections (licensing)	Increase access to streaming TV and Movie content for customers	Number of available TV and Movie tokens to individual customers.	Increasing access to engaging and educational TV to customers across our wide geographic area supports the provincial priority of improving access for British Columbians.	Used grant funds to raise spending limits on VIRL’s two most popular streaming collections – AcornTV and Kanopy.	AcornTV is licensed through participation in the BC Libraries Cooperative.	Adjustments were made in April 2020 and will continue through 2020.	\$14,841	VIRL allocated \$143,175 on streaming video content for 2020. The provincial grant funds will supplement our in-house spending, bringing it to \$158,016.	VIRL doubled the number of weekly AcornTV shows available to customers and removed the 3 shows per customer limit. VIRL increased access to Kanopy shows by boosting the monthly budget by 58%.



Administration

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October 15, 2020

Mari Martin
Director, Libraries Branch
Ministry of Education
PO Box 9831 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9H1

Dear Mari Martin,

Re: 2020 Library Technology Grant

I am pleased to report that Vancouver Island Regional Library has made good use of the \$43,061 provided by the 2020 Library Technology Grant, using the entire grant to enhance VIRL's digital eLibrary offerings.

VIRL's eLibrary has been critically important for our customers in 2020. Since March, we have seen record growth in the number of customers registering to use our eLibrary and in the volume of use by existing customers. Given the clear interest and need for further investment, the technology grant was used to acquire:

1. Licensed CreativeBug - a resource which supports customers of all ages, teachers and community organizations with craft tutorials, templates, videos and more.
2. Additional digital resources to reduce wait times and limits on our most popular content: eBooks, eAudiobooks and streaming TV and movies.

The breakdown of investments is detailed on the attached reporting form. This investment increases equity between communities and enables all residents of VIRL's 42,000 square kilometre service area to participate in an increasingly digital world.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Bonanno, BA MLS
Executive Director

Strong Libraries ■ Strong Communities

Bella Coola Bowser Campbell River Chemainus Comox Cortes Island Courtenay Cowichan Cowichan Lake Cumberland Gabriola Island Gold River Hornby Island Ladysmith Masset Nanaimo Harbourfront Nanaimo North Nanaimo Wellington Parksville Port Alberni Port Alice Port Clements Port Hardy Port McNeill Port Renfrew Quadra Island Qualicum Beach Queen Charlotte Sandspit Sayward Sidney/North Saanich Sointula Sooke South Cowichan Tahsis Tofino Ucluelet Union Bay Woss



2020 Library Technology Grant Report

October 2020

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2020 Library Technology Grant Report
October 2020

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