

Introduction

It is impossible to review 2020 without acknowledging the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has profoundly disrupted public library service delivery. Through the dedication and resilience of our staff and board of trustees, we have adapted and adjusted to the new normal of 'business as possible'.

Greater Victoria Public Library (GVPL) is grateful for the support of the Public Libraries Branch and the BC Partners - BC Library Association (BCLA), BC Library Trustees Association (BCLTA), Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD), and the BC Libraries Co-operative.

The GVPL service area encompasses ten of the thirteen municipalities and five of the ten Indigenous communities in the Capital Regional District. From urban centres to districts with proud cultural, agricultural, and rural traditions, GVPL's service area includes a combined population of approximately 352,000 residents of:

- The District of Central Saanich
- The City of Colwood
- The Township of Esquimalt
- The Esquimalt Nation
- The District of the Highlands
- The City of Langford
- The District of Metchosin
- The District of Oak Bay
- The District of Saanich
- The Scia'new First Nation (Beecher Bay)
- The Songhees Nation
- The Tsartlip First Nation
- The Tsawout First Nation
- The City of Victoria
- The Town of View Royal

2020 marked the final year of GVPL's Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and signalled the beginning of a new planning cycle. The events of the past year have highlighted our strengths and our weaknesses. We are well positioned to take what we have learned and to 'build back better' in both the short and long term.

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PROVINCIAL STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 - IMPROVING ACCESS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS

Public libraries are an integral part of Government's commitment to a province that works for everyone. GVPL's 2016-2020 strategic goal to *engage passionate library members, funders, and partners to expand the library's reach and impact* was at the foundation of an action plan that focused on enhancing community collaborations and highlighted GVPL's commitment to 'doing more with more'. This included work with the BC Library Association (BCLA), Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC), BC Libraries Cooperative, IslandLink Federation, and the South Island Prosperity Partnership (SIPP), as well as local indigenous communities, newcomer and literacy groups, cultural and recreational organizations, and educational institutions, to name a few. This commitment allowed GVPL to deliver 588 programs to 13,695 people in the first two months of 2020.

With a core value of inclusiveness, GVPL is dedicated to reaching, and engaging, diverse communities. In early 2020, we held a joint screening of the film *Picking up the Pieces: The Making of the Witness Blanket* in partnership with the Bruce Parisian Library at the Victoria Native Friendship Centre. We also hosted the *Monthly Dinner with the Support Network of Indigenous Women and Women of Colour*.

GVPL is an active partner in the Greater Victoria Local Immigration Partnership group and continues to work with the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society to support two transitional housing projects in the region. Other key projects supported included working with Together Against Poverty, Downtown Service Providers, UVIC's Chapter of the Pro-Bono Students Canada, Peers Victoria Resources Society, and PACE Society on *ID Clinics* for people who have barriers to accessing replacement ID and transgender people who want to legally change their name and gender marker.

GVPL staff is working with local community partners to re-imagine how programs are delivered. In the wake of the pandemic and the cancellation of regular in-person services, librarians connected with local schools via Zoom and worked with cultural organizations to offer virtual programs. As an alternative to in-person programs, and to encourage community involvement, we integrated the online BC Summer Reading Club with seasonal information tables and displays at library branches. Victoria Seed Library seed swaps were moved outside to adhere to provincial health orders.



A Seed Swap event was held in the Central Branch courtyard in November 2020 as part of the Seed Library program.

PROVINCIAL STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 – BUILDING CAPACITY

GVPL's 2016-2020 strategic goal to inspire discovery through programs, collections, and services that enhance literacy and lifelong learning has created a culture of excellence for staff and board members who strive to access training opportunities that allow them to provide quality and future-focused library services.

Staff adapted to different ways of working in 2020 and investment in new software and equipment gave them the tools to participate in online collaboration and learning. Combining new equipment with existing and recently acquired online learning platforms such as Lynda.com and Niche Academy, increased our capacity to deliver services in creative ways. One example is the Ideas to Go series, which was launched in late 2020 and is ongoing. The series features short videos by librarians that combine their passions, interests, and GVPL resources. All the resources highlighted in the videos are available on gvpl.ca, which is available 24/7.



An episode of Ideas to Go featuring librarian Scott and Scratch, the world's most popular coding community for kids. Ideas to Go was launched in late 2020 and is ongoing.

Microsoft Teams, and the ability of staff and board members to swiftly adapt to this technology, allowed for the seamless transition to remote work during 2020. Everything from committee and board meetings, to working groups and portfolio collaborations, as well as engagement with community partners, went online using Microsoft Teams. One of the advantages of using online meeting tools was that distance and travel restrictions were removed and the sharing of information and knowledge continued uninterrupted.

The encompassing philosophy of lifelong learning at GVPL is embodied in the Community-Inspired Library Service Model, as well as participation in the Library Leadership Excellence and Development (LLEAD) program, BCLTA webinars, and ABCPLD peer-to-peer sharing. Two librarians participated in the LLEAD program as emerging library leaders and CEO Maureen Sawa continued to share her expertise and knowledge as a mentor. During the lockdown, staff contributed to the CULC Think Tank's COVID-19 Toolkit on Recovery and Reimagined Public Library Services.

PROVINCIAL STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 – ENHANCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

GVPL's 2016-2020 strategic goal to *create great library spaces* included the development of a virtual branch, which was instrumental in allowing library services to pivot to digital platforms at the onset of the pandemic. With a full-service virtual branch, the demand for digital collections and services soared. While the physical branches were closed, GVPL staff continued to provide community members with service through the Comments and Questions form on the website, helping patrons access their accounts online and borrow digital materials. In June alone, staff answered 751 questions through this service point, which represented a 265% increase over the previous year. Our customer service telephone line has also proven to be an invaluable and popular support, particularly for new users of our virtual branch. In addition to transactional support such as assisting with library account questions, GVPL staff helped many patrons learn how to access digital resources by walking them through the process, step-by-step over the telephone.

To better serve members of the community, policies were amended to allow for extended borrowing periods, deferred account expirations, and suspended fines.

GVPL adapted its collections and programs to ensure the health and safety of patrons and staff. We created a new collection for the vending machine at the Langford Heritage Branch to allow safe, contactless access to library materials. GVPL remodeled its community engagement approach by providing seasonal Grab and Go tables at branches, setting up Storywalks™ in parks, and moving school visits and community partner meetings online. The BC Summer Reading Club was redesigned into a hybrid model using the online BCSRC website and Grab and Go tables to register children in the self-directed reading program.

The investment in Niche Academy in 2020 further supported patrons' growing use of digital resources by providing ready-to-use tutorials and custom-made staff tutorial videos.



The BC Summer Reading Club was redesigned into a hybrid model using the BCSRC website and Grab and Go tables.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 - ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

GVPL's 2016-2020 strategic goal to *Lead with the support of innovative ideas, service models, and governance* was accomplished in 2020 with no less than three awards and multiple invitations to share our expertise and knowledge on provincial and national taskforces.

GVPL staff participated in the City of Victoria's Welcoming Cities Taskforce, the BC Library Branch's Data Collection Working Group, the CULC Think Tank on Recovery and Reimagined Library Service Post COVID-19, and the virtual Pacific Northwest Conference. Librarians from GVPL were also invited to contribute a chapter for the American Library Association's upcoming book on Libraries and Sustainability, highlighting the Seed Library and Repair Café.

As a member of the South Island Prosperity Partnership, GVPL was represented on the Economic Recovery taskforce promoting the library's leadership in remote learning through online platforms such as Lynda.com and Niche Academy. Staff also provided a Virtual Booth in the Project's Rising Economy Week and mentored girls and young women as part of Soroptimist International.

CEO Maureen Sawa received the Award of Excellence from the Association of BC Public Library Directors in recognition of her outstanding leadership in library advocacy and innovation and her contributions to the library community. Librarian Rachel Rogers won the BC Cataloguing and Technical Services J. McRee Elrod Leadership Award for her contributions to decolonizing subject headings used for Indigenous Peoples. Her work continues to support other libraries through this process and is recognized nationally as a model for demonstrating leadership and cultural sensitivity while moving terminology commonly used to refer to Indigenous Peoples forward and contributing to the reconciliation process.



The award-winning Change Your Mind campaign is predominantly featured on GVPL's newest shuttle vehicle.

GVPL also received second place in the prestigious IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) PressReader International Library Marketing Award 2020 for the Change Your Mind campaign, which used an integrated brand strategy to transform the way people think about libraries in Greater Victoria and beyond.

COVID-19 AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

On March 16, 2020 GVPL closed its physical branches and suspended all in-person services and programs to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. In anticipation of the closure, patrons stocked up on library materials, borrowing more than 30,000 items in a single day; this total represents more than double the daily average circulation.

Within days of the closure, GVPL pivoted to offering virtual services. Maintaining critical services and infrastructure, increasing digital resources, supporting patrons virtually, and welcoming new patrons online became the focus for staff working remotely. GVPL had previously established online library card registration and this allowed new patrons to have instant access to digital collections. There was a 92% increase in the use of digital resources between April and June 2020 and funds from physical collections were relocated to digital resources to keep pace with the surge in demand.

The return to in-person service required considerable flexibility, ingenuity, and attention to detail in the face of evolving scientific information. GVPL began a phased service restoration for its physical branches in June 2020. Branches were re-opened with stringent health and safety protocols and a new service model that allowed for physical distancing and safe interactions. The last of GVPL's physical branches opened on October 9, 2020.

Challenges

- Ensuring staff had the correct equipment and that the infrastructure could support large numbers of staff working remotely.
- Branches with anchored shelving reduced the ability to reconfigure spaces for social distancing.
- Aging IT infrastructure challenged the ability to meet the increased demand for digital resources.
- Significant time and resources were required to develop 'gold standard' WorkSafeBC-approved reopening plans.
- Profound changes to all services to meet safety protocols were required.

Innovation

- Online library card registration implemented in 2017 allowed new patrons to immediately access digital resources.
- Newer branches with mobile furniture and shelving could be reconfigured with all safety protocols in place.
- Socially distanced community engagement was possible with on-the-go programs such as Storywalks™ and takeaway activities at Grab and Go tables.
- Existing relationships facilitated participation in national virtual events that provided patrons access to big-name, international authors, i.e. One Page Literary Festival.

Over the last twelve months, we have seen how important connectivity technology is – for accessing information and staying connected to others. Even when people have adequate connectivity, many of those isolated at home lack the technical skills required to fully utilize the resources and tools available online. GVPL librarians are uniquely placed in that they have familiarity with the level of technical know-how in our community and what types of tools and skills the community both needs and wants. Public service librarians work daily to assist patrons with a variety of technical difficulties and to answer technology-related questions. Patrons have long expressed their desire for GVPL to provide more access to digital equipment that allows people of all ages to preserve their stories, research, and other records.

GVPL's strategic goal to offer new tools and learning opportunities that support the creativity and self-expression of individuals in our community is being realized in the current planning of our first in-branch Digital Media Lab. As outlined in GVPL's interim report, we have designated the 2020 technology grant to make significant enhancements to the design of GVPL's Digital Media Lab, which will open in our new Esquimalt Branch in 2021.

Over the next six months, GVPL librarians will continue work on the selection and design of equipment for the Digital Media Lab, enabling patrons to convert photographs, slides, audio-cassette tapes, and VHS tapes into digital formats. This digital equipment will empower patrons to develop the skills needed to digitize their personal records.

The equipment housed within the Digital Media Lab will initially be made available for staff in a test environment at the Central Branch. This will allow time for the equipment to be configured and for staff training and the establishment of a digital service delivery model. The Lab will then be permanently relocated, for public use, to the newly reconstructed Esquimalt Branch. We look forward to increasing the community's access to new and innovative technologies and providing guidance and training to help patrons acquire the skills to become confident and adept users of these technologies.

SUMMARY

GVPL's Community-Inspired Library Services model continues to guide the organization in discovering and learning new ways to offer innovative library services, both in-person and virtually. Supported by dedicated staff, patrons have learned and adapted to new ways of accessing collections, programs, and resources. This is demonstrated by GVPL's December circulation figures with overall circulation reaching 70% of 2019 levels and materials placed on hold at 89% of the previous year, despite limited hours. However, patrons continue to want access to physical spaces and amenities, and they yearn for the day when libraries can once again act as community living rooms and gathering spaces.

While the opportunity to look at library services in new ways is exciting, the task of leveraging them may challenge the capacity of GVPL's resources. Resources that were redirected successfully to meet immediate needs during the height of the pandemic must now be reconciled. Decisions must be made on the sustainability of services patrons have adapted to. This leads directly into the preparation of a new strategic plan that will begin to address those challenges and opportunities.

GVPL appreciates the ongoing support the Public Libraries Branch provides for public libraries in our community and across the province.

2020 Key Facts and Figures

- 203% increase in online card registration.
- Over 10,000 new cardholders.
- 128% increase in the use of our online contact form (for comments and questions).
 - 223% increase in questions on digital resources.
- 2,630,162 virtual visits.
- 15,806 total views of Niche Academy tutorials in 2020.
- Nearly 2 million physical items circulated.
- 641,136 holds on physical materials filled in eight months.
- 52% increase in digital circulation.
- New digital collections added: Kanopy, Naxos Jazz, Naxos World, Hoopla Comics, French e-audiobooks.
- More than 100 literacy and programming partnerships.
- 3,300 children registered in BC Summer Reading Club.
- Over 1,100 GVPL Books for Babies bags distributed to new parents in GVPL's service area. The bags were funded by a *Times Colonist* literacy grant.

2020 Library Technology Grant – Greater Victoria Public Library: Interim Planning Report

Ref: 219065

I am pleased to submit this interim report regarding the Greater Victoria Public Library's utilization of the 2020 Library Technology Grant. The allocation of 40,605.00 will enable us to make significant enhancements to the Digital Media Lab that is planned for our new Esquimalt branch library which will be opening in 2021.

GVPL's public services librarians work daily with patrons to assist them with new technology and support their efforts to cross the digital divide. Our community needs access to digital equipment so that people of all ages can easily preserve their stories, research and other records. Access to such digital equipment via a library digital lab will allow individuals to develop the skills necessary to convert photographs and various legacy formats into digital formats. GVPL's strategic goal is to offer new tools and learning opportunities that support the creativity and self-expression of individuals in our community, while increasing the use and awareness of the existing resources we have to offer.

GVPL's Digital Media Lab will provide all residents with access to tools to leverage new technologies. Expert guidance from knowledgeable library staff will assist them to learn new skills.

Our project is twofold – we will first create a test environment at the Central Branch to configure equipment, design a staff training program, develop a service model and determine secure storage solutions for digital content.

We will then establish a permanent Digital Media Lab at the Esquimalt Branch library, to be launched when the new branch opens.

As described in the 2020 Library Technology Grant Report Form, we will utilize the Library Technology Grant funds to increase the quantity of equipment that will be introduced through this initiative. Library staff will have the opportunity to learn and refine their technical skills so that they can acquire further expertise to inform them when assisting patrons across the system.

Collaboration with The Victoria Foundation and the Friends of the Greater Victoria Public Library enabled us to establish a base budget for this project. With the additional funds provided by the 2020 Library Technology Grant, it is now possible for us to expand and enhance the original plan to increase the benefits to our users.

We appreciate the support provided by the Ministry of Education to provide public libraries with the ability to expand our capacity to support our community through the provision of equitable access to the technology they need.

Maureen Sawa, CEO

Greater Victoria Public Library

October, 2020

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: GREATER VICTORIA PUBLIC LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: \$40,605

Area of Need	Outcome	Metrics	Strategic Links	Actions	Collaborative Links	Timeframe	Project Budget	In-Kind/Leveraged funds	Comments
Digital programming Digital Media Lab – purchase of equipment	Access to multiple digital tools and channels to encourage creativity and build skills for people of all ages. The digital equipment will allow patrons of all ages to develop the skills necessary to digitize their records	Increased range of easy to use digital equipment and resources to meet the needs of people of all ages seeking to digitally preserve their stories, research and other records.	Provision of equitable access to digital literacy/digital inclusion programs for library users to develop their skills in support of the provincial strategic priority to improve access for British Columbians	Purchase of hardware, software, licenses, and peripherals and related supplies required for the establishment of a Digital Media Lab.	We are building on the success of our existing ‘digi-lab’ (funded by the United Way of Greater Victoria) to establish a permanent Digital Media Lab at our new branch that will open in Esquimalt in 2021.	Q4 2020: Finalize design and equipment requirements; Q1 2021: order hardware, licences, peripherals and related supplies Q2 2021: establish test environment at Central Branch to configure equipment; develop staff training and service model; determine digital storage solution Q3 2021: launch Digital Media Lab (pilot service model) to coincide with new Esquimalt Branch opening	\$94,605.00 Total (40,605 – Library Technology Grant)	Victoria Foundation grant: 15,000 Friends of the Greater Victoria Public Library: 13,000 In-Kind: 26,000 dedicated GVPL staff support for promotion, training and technical support	This will be the first of its kind permanent Digital Media Lab for GVPL. We will build upon its success to leverage additional opportunities for partnerships to further expand GVPL’s digital literacy and inclusion programs