

PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANTS REPORT 2020 VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

Situated on the unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, the Vancouver Public Library (VPL) is one of Vancouver's oldest public institutions. For over one hundred years, VPL has championed the vision of an informed, engaged, and connected city by providing free spaces for everyone to discover, create, and share ideas and information.

The Vancouver Public Library serves a population of 631,486 through the Central library and 20 branches across the city. Vancouver is a thriving urban centre known for its ethnically and linguistically diverse neighbourhoods - it is home to a significant Indigenous population, and 44% of residents speak a language other than English as their first language. It is also a city with an increasing aging population, with the absolute number of seniors growing at twice the rate of growth in the overall population over the past 20 years.

While the City of Vancouver is one of the fastest-growing major metropolitan economies in Canada, the city faces key challenges in terms of housing and affordability. The 2020 Metro Vancouver homeless count found that in Vancouver 2,095 residents identified as homeless.³

In terms of income, Vancouver continues to be one of the more polarized cities in Canada, with disproportionate representation at both ends of the income scale: 14% of Vancouverites are in the top decile of Canadian earners while 15% are in the bottom decile.⁴

VPL's programs and services are popular and heavily used by the community. This proved to be true even in the face of unprecedented challenges driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the closure of library branches took a toll on the typical numbers of patrons served annually, VPL focused on growing its digital service offering and provided an abundance of critically important

¹ "Census Profile, 2016 Census" Statistics Canada. Retrieved February 2nd 2021 from: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-

 $[\]frac{pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E\&Geo1=CMACA\&Code1=933\&Geo2=PR\&Code2=59\&Data=Count\&SearchText=Vancouver\&SearchType=Begins\&SearchPR=01\&B1=All}{}$

² City of Vancouver. Vancouver City Social Indicators Profile 2020. October 2, 2020.

³ Homelessness & Supportive Housing Strategy. City of Vancouver. Retrieved February 5th, 2021 https://council.vancouver.ca/20201007/documents/pspc1presentation.pdf

⁴ City of Vancouver. Vancouver City Social Indicators Profile 2020. October 2, 2020.

services to Vancouverites during this highly challenging year. In 2020, VPL recorded nearly 1.8 million in-person visits and over 6.1 million visits to vpl.ca. Patrons borrowed nearly 6.4 million digital and physical items and received answers to over 297,000 reference questions. By introducing virtual programs, VPL was able to record total program participation of over 140,000.

Our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan was developed based on wide-ranging feedback gathered from over 5,600 patrons, staff, key stakeholders and community members. We heard that VPL must continue to find ways to meet the needs of seniors, newcomers, children, youth, low-income and Indigenous communities. Each of these groups has aspirations and challenges that VPL can support. We identified four strategic priorities grounded in VPL's mission, vision and values: Learning & Creativity; Shared Spaces & Experiences; Belonging & Connection; and Organizational Strength.

COVID-19 AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020, with profound impacts across the globe. In Vancouver, as around the world, society rapidly underwent a radical change in the way people lived, worked, and played. There were unprecedented closures of businesses and civic facilities, and VPL was among them.

VPL suspended in-person services, closing the Central Library and its 20 branches to the public on March 16. As a result, VPL made the difficult decision to temporarily lay off the majority of nearly 800 unionized staff. Most of the remaining staff transitioned to partially or fully working from home.

From April to August, when all or most of its library locations were closed, VPL rapidly shifted its focus to delivering essential services through a 'digital-first' approach. We expanded VPL's Digital Library, including the addition of over 14,000 films through the launch of KANOPY, and introduced over 5,200 new users to digital library resources, enabling continued access to VPL's collections during a period of increased social isolation and financial stress. VPL's digital collection use grew by 52% over the same period in 2019.



We also pivoted to a virtual approach to delivering programming to children, teens and adults, reaching over 76,000 virtual program participants from April to August. VPL quickly adopted a range of digital platforms to offer live streaming events, recorded programs, and online

interactive programming, providing much needed learning and connection to patrons during the pandemic.

VPL resumed offering access to technology at the end of May, opening the Alice MacKay Computer Lab to meet the urgent needs of those without access to a computer, the internet, or a printer. In June, we also launched VPL Takeout, a new service that provided access to VPL's physical collections through pick-up of holds and staff-recommended materials outside of VPL branches. In the first 5 weeks of pilot operations, 97% of Takeout appointments were booked. VPL also continued to support patrons via phone and email, answering close to 65,000 research, technology and information questions from mid-March to August.

Following four months when our doors were closed, VPL began to reopen its branches using a phased approach in mid-July. From July to September, VPL's branches reopened, offering limited services including holds pick-up, access to physical collections in short visits, and scheduled time to use public computers while adhering closely to public health guidelines.

PRIORITY 1 – IMPROVING ACCESS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS

Computer Lab

Providing access to computers, the internet, and printers has long been one of VPL's core offerings and continues to grow in importance as day-to-day life moves increasingly online. The closure of all locations mid-March halted VPL's ability to provide this critical service.

As Provincial health orders evolved and it became clearer that some modified in-person services would be appropriate to resume, providing access to computers, internet and printing was VPL's top priority. Our goal was to meet the urgent needs of the public who lack access to technology, while maintaining safety of our staff and patrons.

On May 25th, we introduced the Alice MacKay Computer Lab (in the lower level of Central Library) as an interim service while VPL's library branches remained closed. Staff developed and implemented COVID-19 safety protocols including social distancing measures, clear signage, PPE worn by all staff and enhanced cleaning.

Registration for 45 minute appointments was available twice daily, in person, to ensure that those without access to technology were able to use the service. Seniors and patrons with accessibility challenges were able to book by phone for the following day, guaranteeing them an appointment without having to line up. By the second week of operation, all appointments were booked within 5 minutes of opening registration.

The computer lab initially had 8 computer workstations and staff added a 9th to address demand early in operations.

The computer lab met the target of 90% utilization of available time by the second week of operation, and sustained a 99% utilization rate for the seven weeks of operation. After July 10th, we resumed offering computer access on level 3 of Central Library. Overall, we were able to offer a total of 1,642 computer sessions in the Alice MacKay Computer Lab.

VPL was the first public library to provide computer access in Canada during the pandemic. Based on our success, we played a leadership role amongst our public library colleagues across the country by providing advice on best practices for safety, cleaning, registration, and work processes.

The experience gained during operation of the Alice MacKay Computer Lab allowed VPL to quickly and safely restore precious computer access at branches and Central during Phase 2 of our restart plan. Key learnings related to cleaning procedures and managing the flow of patrons wishing to access computer workstations informed safe and effective practices as VPL expanded computer access. By the end of the year, VPL was able to reinstate access to 190 workstations and in total, provided over 270,000 workstation sessions through 2020.

Most importantly, we were able to help those without digital access connect to critical social services and reach out to loved ones during a time of tremendous social isolation. Our patrons expressed gratitude for the computer lab, noting the tremendous loss of connection experienced during the Library's closure.

PRIORITY 2 - BUILDING CAPACITY

COVID-19 Safety Training

Given the unparalleled challenges brought on by the pandemic in 2020, VPL's highest priority for training and development was providing staff with the knowledge and skills to continue their work while protecting the health and safety of themselves and the public.

As VPL began reopening, the extraordinary task of ensuring safety for the nearly 800 staff returning to the workplace fell to VPL's Safety Team — a group of staff members brought together in the spring and led by VPL's Safety Coordinator. Their overall mandate was to translate mandatory workplace safety requirements into plans, communications and training so that staff could deliver and support public service safely as library branches reopened.

The team was faced with multiple challenges: staff in a wide variety of roles were returning to work in phases over a 4-month period; perceptions and experiences varied widely amongst staff when it came to safety protocols; and information available about COVID-19 transmission and effective safety protocols continued to evolve.

It quickly became clear that traditional methods of system-wide staff training – large in-person training sessions held over a short period of time - would be impossible during the pandemic. The team developed a flexible approach to meet the varying needs of staff given their individual roles and work locations, and provided multiple touch points to suit an array of learning styles.

The approach to safety training and communications included the following:

- Conducted a staff survey to understand perceptions around safety and comfort levels about returning to work
- Developed an overall system-wide Safety Plan for VPL
- Developed a site-specific safety plan customized to the unique needs and workflows of each unit and location
- Developed a COVID-19 safety video that was required viewing for all staff, and served as a reference tool for ongoing support
- Developed a COVID-19 online Staff Resource Centre with an array of safety-related information, including safety measures, cleaning protocols and health screening
- Key safety messages were delivered by the Chief Librarian during weekly live video calls with all staff, including those laid off, and supported by Q&A with the Safety Coordinator
- The Safety Team conducted in-person visits to all work units before and after reopening to connect with staff and provide advice





At the end of 2020, despite many challenges and concerns, there have been no cases of COVID-19 transmission in any of our locations – demonstrating that the safety training, communications, and protocols followed had been effective.

As information about COVID-19 and effective safety protocols continues to change over time, the team is remaining up-to-date and modifying information for staff on an ongoing basis. All of the safety training and communication tools will be in place until the end of the pandemic.

PRIORITY 3 - ENHANCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Public Survey

With the announcement in May of BC's phased reopening plan, VPL saw an opportunity to gain insight about the public's readiness to return to the library and to discover which services were most in demand in the context of COVID.

VPL's public survey on reopening plans was one of several community consultation initiatives run by the City during this time. VPL staff used the web-based survey in combination with information captured from other City initiatives to inform all aspects of our pandemic response.

VPL's public survey was live on the web from May 15th-27th. The community response exceeded our expectations. The survey generated nearly 7,000 responses with many indicating how they had missed VPL's physical services, expressing support for safe reopening, and appreciation for VPL's staff. While the survey generated fewer responses from people with lower levels of income and formal education, it was encouraging to hear patrons speak out on the importance of the library's services for all members of their community.

The results of the survey showed us that:

- Borrowing print books and picking up holds were the services most missed overall
- Significant support existed for alternative services such as outdoor pickup of holds and takeout services
- Generally speaking, men and people with lower incomes were more ready to return to the library – helping to inform the reintroduction of our services and communications



- Respondents from different demographic groups varied in terms of the importance placed on the various library services. For example:
 - Older respondents missed 'seeking information and advice from library staff' more than younger respondents
 - Respondents in the lowest income and formal education brackets demonstrated the highest demand for access to computers
 - Younger and lower-income respondents missed using the library as a place to read or study the most



The public response to the survey provided a wealth of insight to help inform all phases of our reopening plans. The results confirmed, for example, that VPL was on the right track to maintain and expand phone support to assist patrons in accessing eBooks and other electronic resources, or for those who simply appreciated speaking to a real person during these uncertain times. The results also underscored the demand for computer access, which supported the ongoing provision of the computer lab described above. VPL also prioritized access to holds and limited browsing upon reopening for modified in-person services. More recently, the survey results enabled us to identify the optimal service hours for each branch, as well as informing our current phase of re-introducing limited seating in certain branches.

PRIORITY 4 - ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

Assessing Strategic Plan Goals In Light of the Pandemic

VPL's 2020 to 2023 Strategic Plan was ready for public release in March 2020 when the global COVID-19 pandemic struck. It had been informed by key stakeholder input and a strategic assessment which included a scan of the library's external landscape. The strategic goals were approved by the Board in December 2019.

Given the significance of the pandemic's impact on the lives of individuals, and with the unprecedented amount of change in the environment in which VPL operates, staff deemed it important to review the recently developed Strategic Plan goals in light of the pandemic and other important events of 2020.

VPL conducted this review using a two-pronged approach: first, we undertook a thorough update to the library's external landscape scan focusing on events unique to 2020, and second, we assessed each strategic goal against key findings in the landscape scan to determine if changes were needed.

The external landscape scan included research into key themes: Economy, Technology, and Society and Culture. Relevant findings highlighted the massive economic downturn, closures of businesses and public spaces, the mental health impacts of increased financial insecurity and health concerns paired with limited social interactions, the deepening of the digital divide with increased focus on online service delivery and remote work, growing concerns about misinformation and an explosion in the fight for equity and social justice for BIPOC populations.

VPL then reviewed each of the thirteen goals in the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, highlighting relevant research findings and providing a brief assessment of the implications for each goal. We concluded that some goals, such as bridging the digital divide, providing patron-centred digital experiences, reducing social isolation and providing affordable access, were even more important given the impacts of the pandemic. Other goals, such as developing welcoming, accessible and sustainable facilities were deemed to remain relevant in the long term. Reflecting and celebrating Indigenous cultures remained critically important.



This review and assessment process led the board to confidently conclude that the goals in our Strategic Plan, with only one minor change, remain relevant to the library's vision, mission and values despite the profound changes brought on by the pandemic and other important events of 2020, and provide the direction we need to guide our services in the coming years. The Strategic Plan was subsequently launched to staff and made available to the public at the end of 2020.

SUMMARY

Challenges and Opportunities

An ongoing challenge for VPL is to meet the needs of our communities while continuing to operate in a pandemic. This includes determining the right approach and timing to safely

reintroduce services. While VPL has plans in place to return to full hours and expand services through 2021, we must be nimble to respond to the changing environment. The events of 2020 have taken a toll on staff, particularly those in public-facing roles. While our workforce overall is resilient, there is no doubt that levels of stress have increased. Ensuring that staff have the support and resources needed to adapt to our transforming work environment will be a focus for 2021.

A trend that clearly emerged in 2020 is the shift to digital; the growth in use of digital content is anticipated to be permanent, even as use of physical content resumes. At year-end, digital collection use had retained much of the year-over-year growth it experienced during closure. Patrons of all ages have experienced the convenience of digital access. In the words of one patron:

We will both be 74 years old in 2021... [VPL's Digital Library] is a life-saver in many ways. The pandemic gave us the motivation to make the move to digital...Frankly, once one climbs the hill of obtaining the right equipment and setting it up properly - and VPL is doing excellent work in facilitating this for patrons – then it is a valuable and worthwhile resource. It is literally essential for our living a better lifestyle right now.

Another patron shared that she has been watching all the recorded Babytimes on Youtube with her 12 month old. She joined us [on the livestream] for the first time and was so excited to be singing and dancing with us live! She told us she and her baby have learned so many new songs and her child has been doing hand motions to songs she has learned via our Youtube channel.

The shift to digital presents a clear opportunity for VPL to accelerate digital investments and strategically balance resources between digital and in-person service delivery and collection provision.





TECHNOLOGY GRANT - FINAL REPORT

Total Technology Grant Amount: \$47,253

Summary

During 2020, VPL responded to the considerable demand for digital programs, support, and materials due to Covid-19 related health and safety concerns. This is a shift that has demanded (1) Increasing staffing in video / digital production; (2) licensing new software and digital collections; and (3) rethinking delivery of core programs intended for connecting communities and encouraging literacy.

With funds from the one-time Digital Technology Grant, VPL funded various transformations of services to address these needs.

We have:

- Transformed core, in person children's programs into digitally consumable formats;
- Supported access to digital collections for patrons previously interested in print only
- Envisioned how to build digital skills for both staff and the public through programs delivered virtually

This transformative work done in 2020 (wrapping up in March 2021) was only possible with the support of this grant funding. It enabled us to achieve many digital transformational goals from the 2020-2023 strategic plan and accelerated the pace of this work to meet with the urgent digital needs created by the pandemic.

Below are the priority areas we addressed, followed by the metrics that tracked our progress.

Outcomes Overview

Improved Access to Programs and Support

VPL Virtual Story Times – The COVID gathering restrictions left families who previously relied on in-person story times isolated, unconnected, and with fewer opportunities to nurture early literacy skills. By increasing staffing with skills in video production, VPL transformed 3 core program series

to a virtual format. This reconnected families to familiar library programs and allowed preschool and school-aged children, parents and caregivers to engage in entertaining and educational programs, as well as introduced these series to new users who prefer digital access.

Discovering the Digital Library – Physical distancing recommendations spurred changes in reading and in service usage patterns. Due to health and safety concerns, patrons who previously relied on print have turned to digital collections. By creating programming targeted to specific audiences who may be interested in dipping their toes into digital reading, listening, and viewing, VPL continued to make digital resources and services available to new digital learners and broaden the resources available to Vancouverites.

Developed Skills and Expanded Resources

Zoom, A New Digital Essential Skill — With limited in-person options, Vancouverites were looking for new ways to connect online personally and professionally. VPL has developed a series of digital programs providing instruction on how to attend an online program, and demonstrated ways to stay connected to friends and family using patrons' existing hardware (phone, tablet, computer). Patrons learned the practicalities of using Zoom, and also best practices for hosting their own Zoom meetings.

Sharing Your Voice – VPL launched a series of digital programs that increased the audio and video digital skills of patrons. Four core Inspiration Lab courses were transformed to virtual delivery. These courses provided patrons with tools to create their own podcast, knowledge of how to conduct virtual interviews, and explored best practices in both audio and video production.

Expanded Digital Magazine Access – VPL invested in 25 new magazine titles to increase access to high interest media in a digital only environment and provide needed stimulation and recreation.

Digital Programs Impact and Comments from Patrons:

Overall our patrons felt welcomed and comfortable in the new digital programs they attended, and said that they learned something. Many of them reported that as a result of the course that they were inspired to take action and or try something new.

- 93% of attendees indicated that they felt "very welcomed and comfortable" at the program they attended.
- 76% said they felt more connected to other people as a result of the program they attended.
- 72% said they learned a lot; 24% said they learned a little.
- 97% said the program they attended inspired them to take an action or try something new.
- 83% said the program met their expectations; 17% said it partially met them.

From patrons who said they would take an action or try something new – "what are you going to do as a result of attending this program?"

"Will try hosting meetings after this workshop" – attendee at How to Host a Zoom Meeting

- "I went through the various areas of the digital VPL site, tested out searching for books, requested two books on hold." attendee at Enjoying Ebooks and Audiobooks on Your Phone or Tablet
- "Experiment more with my kobo" attendee at Enjoying Ebooks and Audiobooks on Your Kobo
- "I'm going to create my own brand" attendee at Let's Talk About Self-Publishing

From patrons who answered that they felt "very" or "somewhat" welcome, answers to "What was it about the program that made you feel welcome?"

- "Very laid-back presenter; small group; presenter was willing to stop and answer questions; presenter was willing to acknowledge if there was something they were not familiar with" attendee at Enjoying Ebooks and Audiobooks on Your Kobo
- "We could ask any question we wanted and it was our pace" attendee at How to Host a Zoom Meeting

General Comments

- "It was a great introduction and I wish I had done it sooner!" attendee at Let's Talk About Sound Recording
- "Learned more than expected Thank you so much for doing this!" attendee at How to Host a Zoom Meeting
- "It was easy to understand and has many good information. Thank you for the great program!" attendee at Let's Talk About Self-Publishing
- "My goal was to learn to download libby, explore the VPL digital library functions and accessing e-book borrowing. This is a new area of the VPL for me. My goal was achieved with concise and clear instructions from Zoey. Thank you." attendee at Enjoying Ebooks and Audiobooks on Your Phone or Tablet
- "They were patient with everyone and allowed us to play around with Zoom and ask questions. We covered most of what was intended but it was the practical things we asked was where I learned the most. The atmosphere was good though some people chose not to show their face or say much at all. It happened to be a small class which allowed for more interaction and freedom." attendee at How to Host a Zoom Meeting
- "Thank you. I love you. You've been my best friend since I was 7!" attendee at Practice Zoom
- "Thanks for a great overview. I am fairly comfortable with using the digital options but was able to learn a lot more." attendee at Enjoying Ebooks and Audiobooks on Your Phone or Tablet
- "Happily, there was a Zoom workshop the next day which [a staff member] told me about and I attended [...]. It was wonderful--well done and clear--and so I'm able to read books again. Really it's opened up a door I am so grateful to be able to walk through again." attendee at Enjoying Ebooks and Audiobooks on Your Phone or Tablet

Virtual Storytime Comments

- We sure enjoy the online story option during this challenge time. In the spring when things were so challenging it was such a bright spot in our mornings.
- I had a patron today during a Zoom Babytime share with us that she has been watching all the recorded Babytimes on Youtube with her 12 month old. She joined us for the first time today and was so excited to be singing and dancing with us live! She told us she and her baby have learned so many new songs and her child has been doing hand motions to songs she has learned via our Youtube channel.
- I had a family in Children's Library on Sunday, Dec 20, tell me how much they are enjoying our online programs. For their daily routine they watch the live program with their little one, and then they let her pick one other Facebook or Youtube program to watch. They've bought her jingle bells because she enjoys joining in with the songs. They were very excited to have signed up for Happy Noon Year, their first zoom program, and their kid is particularly excited to see the other kids.

Additional details on these areas of need and outcomes are detailed below.

Outcome	Goals	Results	Strategic Links	Area of Need Met	Collaborative Links	Provincial Funds	In-Kind/ Leveraged funds
Leveraged Zoom Platform	Program suites: 75 adult programs 20 Zoom skill development programs Including "Connecting through Zoom" program	95 adult programs total; 20 Zoom Skill Development Programs 11 participants average per program 899 participants overall	Improving Access; Developing Skills	Digital platform for video calls during patron programs		\$2,250	\$1,500 in existing expenditures leveraged.
Planned and Produced Adult Skill-focused Virtual Programming	Deliver key virtual service programs: "Discovering the Digital Library" - 15 programs "Connecting through Zoom" - 20 programs "Share Your Voice" (audio	All programs delivered Sample patron feedback: "I went through the various areas of the digital VPL site, tested out searching for books, requested two books on hold." — attendee at Enjoying Ebooks and	Improving Access; Developing Skills	Digital programming topics that met the digital first communication trend Staffing to support the development of adult virtual programs	Partnering with the DOXA Podcast Festival to virtually launch the Let's talk about Podcast course (part of the "Share Your Voice" stream) in November 2020.	\$15,000	\$30,000 in existing staffing expenditures leveraged.

	focus) - 30 programs "Share Your Voice" (video focus) - 10 programs	Audiobooks on Your Phone or Tablet "It was a great introduction and I wish I had done it sooner!" – attendee at Let's Talk About Sound Recording "Learned more than expected Thank you so much for doing this!" – attendee at How to Host a Zoom Meeting				
Licensed High Interest Digital Magazines	~25 high interest digital magazines licensed and promoted 15 "Discovering Digital Magazines and Newspapers" programs 10% increase in digital magazine webpage traffic	~25 high interest digital magazines licensed and promoted 6 "Discovering Digital Magazines and Newspapers" programs delivered 37% increase in digital magazine webpage traffic	Improving Access	Deeper electronic collections licensing	\$10,000	\$30,000 from existing electronic collections licensing funds.

Created video- based programs to connect to family audiences who were unable to attend in-person programming due to COVID isolation and closures.	Virtual story times for pre-school aged children (via Facebook Live and YouTube) 6 days/week "Virtual Babytime" for caregivers of infants 1 day/week Virtual story time for elementary school-aged children 1 day/week. Storytimes offered in additional languages — priority to languages most commonly spoken at home by Vancouver residents, and by priority audiences	55 virtual storytimes, babytimes, and read alongs Approximately 540 views on each video 324% increase on video views YTD 2020/2021 vs. 2019 Approximately 62,000 total Facebook Live Storytime views (1 minute or longer duration) Storytimes recorded in Mandarin, Cantonese, French, Tagalog, and Haida. Multilingual storytime offerings are our most popular recorded content for children.	Improving Access; Developing Skills	Early Literacy digital programming Programming supporting virtual social connections for Middle Years children and parents Staffing to support the creation of video story times for children ages 0 -7	Partnerships with the Vancouver School Board (Summer Reading Club recorded programming) and Vancouver Childcare partners	\$20,000	Approximately \$67,000 in existing, operational staffing expenditures leveraged.
---	--	--	--	---	--	----------	--