



Provincial Library Grants Report 2019

Introduction

About Us:

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



Our branches are key gathering places in our communities. Since 2011, VIRL has opened 16 renovated or refurbished branches to serve our customers' needs. These branches serve our

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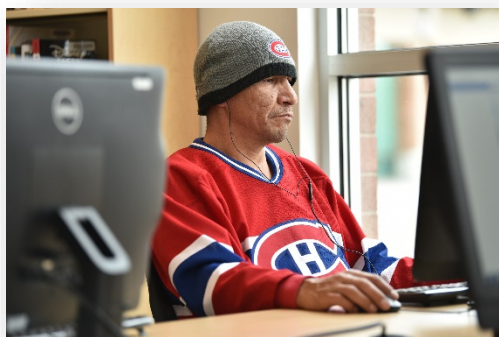
largest community (Nanaimo) and some of our smallest (Sayward, Hornby Island), with more construction projects planned. In every project we undertake, we assess the needs of each community through detailed analysis and public consultations to ensure we are providing spaces that will suit our communities for many years to come.

Below is a view of VIRL's service area, demographics, and size:

- Service area size: 42,000 square kilometers
- Population served: 457,000
- Membership demographics:
 - 12% Children
 - 5% Teens
 - 83% Adults
- Collection (physical materials) size: 730,166 in 2019
- Total visitors: 2.3 million in 2019
- Total circulation of physical items: 3.9 million in 2019
- Total circulation of online resources: 1.1 million in 2019

Challenges We Face

Many of our branches are at the frontline of substance use issues, homelessness, and other social challenges in our communities. VIRL is committed to being open and accessible, while still providing a safe and welcoming space for everyone. We also serve large communities of seniors who are increasingly facing issues such as dementia, social isolation, and mobility restrictions. There is no easy solution but 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. We strive to provide gateways to information, vital resources for families and newcomers, spaces that nurture new business enterprises and relationships, and beacons that open doors for our marginalized community members.



Like many other large multi-generational public service sectors, we are experiencing workplace challenges and shifts. Our workforce spans the full spectrum of age ranges. Each generation collectively maintains different values, attitudes, behaviours, and approaches to technological change. Additionally, we are experiencing a rise in retirements from long-serving staff members.

To succeed as a vital public resource, VIRL recognizes that it needs to support its staff (and ultimately the library customers) by respecting the multiple perspectives our employees represent. We are investing in skills training for our staff to ensure they have the tools to deliver the best service possible to our communities.

VIRL's Strategic Plan

VIRL is in the fifth and final year of its [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.

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.

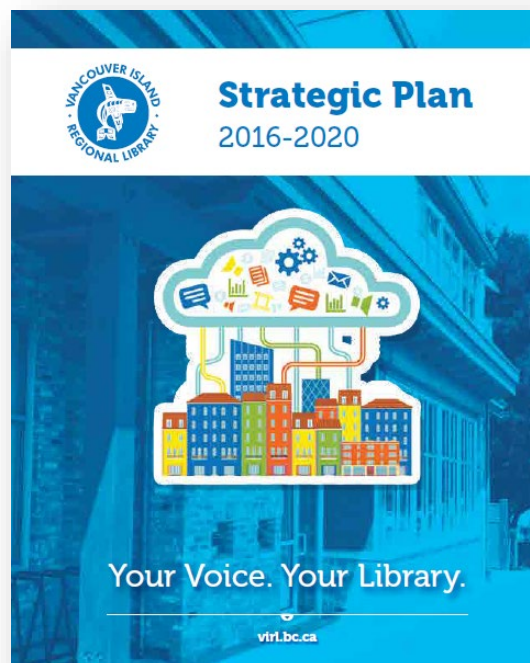
Values

- 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 tactical initiatives that have set the foundation for our future direction to 2020. Many of these initiatives are discussed in detail in the pages to follow.



Listening to Our Communities

VIRL has committed to creating opportunities to speak with and listen to communities. We did this in 2019 by responding to the needs of our communities. We created new opportunities to speak with those in our communities through the following initiatives:

Elimination of Children's Fines



At the end of 2018 VIRL's Board of Trustees approved the business case for the elimination of children's fines. In early 2019, we removed all fines on children's materials ensuring that library services and resources are available to some of our customers who need them most.

This board approved initiative opened new doors of discovery for kids and families across our system. Access to books and story times are critical to early literacy and we want to ensure access to our services and resources for families of all income levels, making us a public service people can count on. To date we have seen a 7% reduction in juvenile accounts that are blocked from use due to high fines and an increase in circulation of juvenile material by 13%. There are many reasons circulation could increase, the elimination of fines on children's material is likely only one aspect.

I Love My Library Month

October is Library Month at VIRL. To celebrate, VIRL showed its appreciation for Indigenous peoples, cultures, customs, and creations through a variety of activities, including:

- Indigenous speakers and author talks
- Indigenous-led story times for children
- Indigenous film nights
- Indigenous language lessons for children
- Development of Kwak'wala language cultural literacy kits for members to borrow



Indigenous Voices Program

This Board-approved initiative launched in January 2018 at our Sidney/North Saanich branch. By year's end, 20 Indigenous Elders had hosted 56 events across 20 VIRL communities to 1,384 total participants. Attendees learned about reconciliation and residential schools, listened to creation stories, embarked on medicine walks to discover medicinal uses of local plants, participated in drum making sessions and smudging ceremonies...and so much more. The Indigenous Voices initiative was a movement that advanced reconciliation and forged new relationships and understandings in library branches from Sidney to Masset.

In 2019 the program continued with approximately 30 programs in branches all over the island. Programs included drum making workshops, elder hosted events, and Indigenous story times just to name a few.

Vancouver Island Regional Library's Indigenous Voices program took home a prestigious Building Better Communities award at the 2019 BC Library Association (BCLA) conference. The Building Better Communities award recognizes an individual or organization for increasing the relevancy and impact of library service through partnership, collaboration, and building trust where little had previously existed.



Sparking Imagination

A key component of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan is to spark imagination and collaboration by providing access to new technology and opportunities to create content.

In 2019, we launched the new and improved Creativity Commons space in Nanaimo. Within VIRL, the Creativity Commons is positioned to be the prime resource for our branches to promote access and become informed on technical and digital changes in our society. It is located on the 2nd floor of the Nanaimo Harbourfront branch.

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. Staff from other branches can visit Creativity Commons to gain experience and training on new technology.

Key Goals of the Creativity Commons

- Foster creativity and imagination through exploration and self-discovery
- Support urban and rural branches with access to STEAM learning resources
- Provide equitable access to a variety of technology and resources
- Keep staff up-to-date with current trends and skills

Some of the equipment available to the public in Creativity Commons includes:

- 3D printing
- Virtual reality
- Book printing
- Recording studio with a green screen and musical instruments
- Digital Conversion Station
- Computer lab
- And much more!



Creating New 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 rural of communities, with our most recent new build in the community of Sayward.

Our goal is to create library spaces that are flexible and adaptable to address current and future demands. In 2019 alone, VIRL built new branches or refurbished exiting branches in the following communities:

- Parksville (refurbishment)
- Sidney (refurbishment)
- Sayward (new building)
- Chemainus (new building)



Developing Staff

VIRL knows that to be successful, staff need support, training, and development. In 2019 VIRL introduced a new performance management program to help staff create realistic and achievable goals toward their continued success. In addition, new training offerings and programs have been rolled out, and staff have been involved in more committees, work plan projects, and strategic initiatives than ever before.

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:

Library goal #1: To remove financial barriers for families in accessing library resources, helping to make life more affordable and delivering services that people can count on regardless of their financial means.

Library goal #2: To spark imagination and collaboration by providing access to new technology and opportunities to create content.

Library goal #3: To improve facilities and technology throughout our system to ensure that our libraries are vibrant, welcoming, inclusive, and accessible community hubs.

How we did it:

- Elimination of fines on children's material
- Launch of the new and improved Creativity Commons with new equipment and spaces for creation.
- Expansion of our "Tinker Totes" that provide STEAM activities for library members to borrow and take home.
- Refurbishment of two library branches and one newly built branch with the latest in technology offerings, refreshed collections, welcoming and accessible spaces and features.

Outcomes:

The outcome of these activities has been:

- Increased engagement with families and community partners who serve families with children.
- New equipment such as a 3D printer, recording studio with instruments, virtual reality station, and digital conversion station has given our community access to a space to create content.
- The new and improved Creativity Commons space is attracting members of the small business community, families, seniors, local musicians, gamers, and local artists. Access to the tech resources in this space sparks imagination, creates collaboration, and offers opportunities to create and learn.

Outputs:

- The number of blocked juvenile accounts has decreased and juvenile membership has increased. While there are many factors that contribute to increased membership, we see this trend as an indication that reducing financial barriers to families with children has a positive impact.
- Courses have been offered from the Creativity Commons computer lab on genealogy basics, computer basics, and 3D printing. More courses are planned for 2020.

Priority 2 – Developing Skills

Excellence in programming and collections (both print and digital) empower our communities by providing services and resources 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 educational and skill development needs of our communities. Some goals in this area include:

Library goal #1: Sparking imagination and collaboration by providing access to new technology and opportunities to create content.

Library goal #2: Developing programs and resources that appeal to people from a broad range of demographics and cultures, as well as those with different learning styles and levels of literacy.

Library goal #3: Reducing barriers to access and ensuring the resources we provide are user-friendly for all people.

How we did it:

- Increased our physical and digital collections budgets to ensure relevant material is available to our communities.
- Renewed subscriptions to a variety of skill building databases such as Lynda.com, Career Cruising, and Mango Languages, to name a few.
- Developed and delivered programs related to computer basics training, language classes, early literacy, STEAM learning, and more.
- Community partnership with organizations such as the Community Health and Wellness Collaborative (Gabriola), Nanaimo Arts Council, VIU Writing Department, Comox Valley Adult Learning Centre and many others contribute to skill development in our communities.

Outcomes:

The outcome of these activities has been:

- Increased engagement with members of our community looking for opportunities to learn a new skill.
- New equipment such as a 3D printer, recording studio with instruments, virtual reality station, and digital conversion station has given our community access to a space to develop new tech skills.
- Partnerships with community organizations providing skill development and access to resources allows VIRL to deliver services that people can count on.

Outputs:

- Over 156,000 people attended programs in VIRL branches in 2019
- Over 60,000 online learning sessions were viewed by members in 2019

Priority 3 – Collaborating on Shared Goals

Developing and maintaining strong relationships is fundamental to moving libraries' shared strategies forward. These partnership opportunities allow us to connect with our communities, execute our initiatives, and (with the help of increased advertising and promotion), show that the library is a vibrant, welcoming place for people of all socio-economic groups, cultures, and literacy levels.

Library goal #1: Create opportunities to speak with and listen to communities on an ongoing basis.

Library goal #2: Develop and build current and new partnerships with organizations to position the library as a community hub.

Library goal #3: Reach out to Indigenous communities to address their unique needs.

How we did it:

- Indigenous Voices Program: In 2019 we expanded the Indigenous Voices program to offer a wider range programs such as author's readings, discussion groups, book clubs, language sessions and Indigenous movie nights, to name a few.
- Indigenous Partnerships:
 - Reconciliation Canada
 - Cowichan Tribes
 - Snuneymux'w First Nation
 - K'omoks First Nation
 - Mid Island Metis Nation
 - Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation
 - Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre
 - Elders representing various First Nations throughout our region

Outcomes:

The outcome of these activities has been:

- Increased engagement with members of our Indigenous communities
- Educating non-Indigenous people about various Indigenous cultures on Vancouver Island.
- New opportunities to engage with First Nations and develop programs and resources that engage and appeal to them.

Outputs:

- Creation of 9 Kwak'wala language cultural literacy kits in collaboration with First Nation members. Kits include:
 - Kwak'wala-language edition of Robert Munsch book, "I Love You Forever," which includes CD of book being read in Kwak'wala
 - DVD of short film by the late First Nations filmmaker Barb Cranmer called *Potlatch to Give*
 - CD of traditional music, a shape game, animal hand puppet, and books

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.

Library goal #1: Initiate optimal performance and outcome measures to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all our customers.

Library goal #3: Create opportunities to speak with and listen to communities on an ongoing basis.

Library goal #4: Work to align our goals and priorities across the library system, within both our public service and support departments.

How we did it:

- The development of a new Balanced Scorecard for our Board of Trustees
- Public consultations
- Creation of a comprehensive work plan involving staff throughout the organization

Outcomes:

The outcome of these activities has been:

- VIRL's new Balanced Scorecard tracks key performance indicators and provides impact stories in four key areas:
 - Customers & Community
 - Library Collections
 - Innovation & Learning
 - Financial performance
- These quarterly results are communicated to VIRL's Board of Trustees, and provide management with the information to prioritize system-wide initiatives and campaigns to address areas in need of improvement.
- Feedback from our communities regarding hours of service for new branches and refurbishments.
- Engaged staff at all levels working on projects and initiatives that move us toward accomplishing VIRL's strategic goals. This resulted in the successful completion of several key projects at VIRL such as staff inclusion and diversity training, upgraded check out technology in our branches, a pilot One Book One Community book club, research into our public's computing needs, the kick off to our 2021-2026 strategic planning process and much more.

Outputs:

- Four new spaces were opened in 2019 with increased open hours, increased staffing, and additional space to meet community needs.
- 11 work plan projects were completed in 2019.

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 and position our communities for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Looking ahead, we hope to continue to be early digital adopters and that empower our communities as creators, consumers, and leaders. We look forward to our ongoing partnership with the province and all the great things we can accomplish together.

