INTRODUCTION

The Tumbler Ridge Public Library is a multi-service community hub. Tumbler Ridge is a resource-based, isolated community consisting of approximately 2215 residents, according to statistics compiled by BC Stats in 2019[1]. In 2014, 3 mines closed in Tumbler Ridge, forcing most of the community out of work. One of the mines was purchased and re-started in 2016, employing about 900 workers directly, while others have found work in other resource-based industries, such as oil and gas. However, all of them face the same pressure in their employment, the uncertainty of employment in the natural resource sector. As we are located over 100 KM from the nearest town with provincial and federal government service offices, the Library has become an essential community resource, offering both employment services and social supports, for these workers and families alike. We provide resume and job search assistance and have hosted Service Canada and WorkBC several times. Digital literacy has become a prevalent part of our proffered services; a large part of our staff time is spent assisting adults, notably workers over the age of 50, with laptop, tablet and phone use. This includes connecting to the Internet or Wi-Fi, printing, email access and much more. We have become a Community Hub, offering many non-traditional services, along with the usual Library services; all of which are heavily used. Our collections are very popular, and we are a net lender, loaning about 8000 items per year to other libraries in BC and Canada. In addition, our children's and adult programming is well-attended (virtually!) and continues to expand in response to our community's needs. We are a safe space where people of all ages, regardless of age, race, sex or creed can come use our services or simply have someone listen to them.

The town's population briefly dropped following the mine layoffs, which resulted in our primary and secondary health care services being further slashed down, when we were already running at reduced capacity. The Library continues to act as an interim social agency, offering help with job searches, social service applications, adult literacy and more. Other social issues such as addictions and mental health continue to tax staff resources.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a natural fit to focus on "improving access for British Columbians"[2] and "advancing citizen engagement"[3]. During a time where our clients were isolating at home and experiencing the "new norm" of a pandemic-ridden world, we put forth our best efforts to engage with our clients and provide them with a new, safe way to access materials, programming, and Library services, which they had always relied on and become accustomed to. As noted in the Executive Summary of the Ministry of Education's Libraries and Literacy Branch's Strategic Plan, to best serve our clients, we must "[work] to enhance the capacity of libraries to deliver services people rely on"[4]

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[1] Community Profile - Tumbler Ridge, BC (investtumblerridge.ca)

[2] https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/community-partnerships/libraries/libraries-strategic-plan.pdf p.4

[3] https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/community-partnerships/libraries/libraries-strategic-plan.pdf p.4

[4] https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/community-partnerships/libraries/libraries-strategic-plan.pdf p.4

While the Tumbler Ridge Public Library does not currently have a strategic plan itself, we endeavour to follow the Ministry of Education's Libraries and Literacy Branch's Strategic Plan. We had anticipated creating our own strategic plan with the assistance of the Federation Manager when we were supposed to host the North East Library Federation (NELF) Board and Directors' meetings in May of 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings were cancelled, and we were unable to develop our strategic plan. It is our intention once again to develop our strategic plan with the Federation Manager once it is safe to reschedule the NELF Board and Directors' meetings.

IMPROVING ACCESS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS

As COVID-19 took hold, our world shifted online. Work, school, family and friends went from being in-person experiences to digital meetings. The Tumbler Ridge Public Library closed to the public in early March and did not re-open until June 11, at reduced hours. During this closure, our senior staff continued to work on-site, following social distancing guidelines, to continue administrative tasks such as collection development and more importantly, develop online programming and develop the WorkSafeBC COVID safety plan for re-opening.

As noted in the strategic plan, it is essential to "[leverage] strengths and structure to deliver user-centred programs and services"[5]. One of our most popular programs, our Summer Reading Club, is traditionally offered in person for children of all ages, 5 days a week for an hour, in order to help develop, strengthen and maintain literacy skills during the summer months. As we could not offer an in-person program due to the pandemic, we developed a mix of online and at-home programming, consisting of videos and craft kits delivered to children's homes. Weekly crafts kits were delivered to participants on Monday mornings, containing 2 crafts per day for the week. Staff created and posted daily videos including 3-4 books read aloud (possible due to publishers waiving their copyrights for the summer) and 2 how-to craft videos (print instructions were included in all craft kits for families without internet access). We also partnered with a local summer camp, where it accommodated up to 12 children, with social distancing and masks, to attend a live story reading and create crafts three times a week.

In 2018, our in-person Summer Reading Club averaged 40-50 children in attendance daily. In 2019, that increased to 50-60 daily. Our online program in 2020 not only saw a 20-30% increase (we were delivering 70-80 weekly craft kits) but ended up having one of the highest participation rates in our Region for a summer reading club at the Library!

BUILDING CAPACITY

In early March 2020, two staff members of the Tumbler Ridge Public Library were able to attend the Ontario Library Association Super Conference in Toronto, ON. Staff were given the opportunity to forgo the conference if they did not feel comfortable traveling, given the rumors surrounding this new mysterious,

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[5] https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/community-partnerships/libraries/libraries-strategic-plan.pdf p.4

emerging virus, but both staff members chose to attend, in order to attend panels and discussions at the largest Library conference in Canada.

Attending the OLA Super Conference afforded Tumbler Ridge Public Library staff the chance to learn from and discuss ideas and initiatives with a wide variety of librarians, technicians, programmers…etc. all hailing from different types of libraries. This type of professional development is crucial in order "to support the delivery of quality programming and services that people depend on"[6]. By participating in a larger conversation, we can garner new ideas and techniques to apply to our own framework in Tumbler Ridge.

ADVANCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

The Tumbler Ridge Public Library has always been a responsive organization. As previously mentioned, when Tumbler Ridge experienced an economic downturn in 2014, the Library began offering a free resume writing service, to help workers find employment. From there, we partnered with Service BC in order to receive training for staff to help clients fill out social assistance forms, update claims…etc. We were also made aware that while families were struggling financially, many experienced difficulties in feeding their children. This led to our After School Snack program being launched, where children could come to the Library after school to receive a free, healthy snack.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Library staff began offering as many non-contact services as possible. Clients reached out, wanting materials, programming, printing…etc. and our staff adjusted services accordingly to keep staff and clients safe. Readers' advisory was provided over the telephone; we helped clients to access free online materials with their library cards, such as e-books and audiobooks through Overdrive. For clients who preferred physical materials, we dropped off items with non-contact to front doors. Programming was moved online, where it was possible to do so.

As the Library acts as a makeshift social agency in our community, we continued to help clients over the phone and online during our closure to the public. We were able to help client continue to apply for social assistance programs such as EI and CERB. We also were able to fax and print for clients, regarding work, health, and social assistance matters. We met clients outside of the Library, picked up items with gloves, faxed or printed their items, returned the items to clients, and cleaned our surfaces and equipment. Despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic, we continued to "work to improve people's access to government resources and tools"[7].

ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

Our Library had anticipated hosting the North East Library Federation (NELF) Board and Directors' meetings in May of 2020, which would have provided an excellent training opportunity for both our staff and Board Members. As previously stated, two of our staff were able to attend the OLA Super Conference in March, however, not many other training opportunities have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are eager to

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[6] https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/community-partnerships/libraries/libraries-strategic-plan.pdf p.10

[7] https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/community-partnerships/libraries/libraries-strategic-plan.pd p. 11

host the rescheduled conference and look forward to this opportunity for professional development for our Board members and staff alike.

The Library had some issues re-opening following closure due to COVID-19. After consulting with various Library Directors across BC over Zoom, in tandem with following emerging Provincial and Federal guidelines and those put forth by WorkSafe BC and the Public Health Office, the Library was able to develop and implement a safety plan in May. However, as the Library is housed in the Tumbler Ridge Community Centre, we were unable to open, as the District of Tumbler Ridge had not yet implemented their safety plan to re-open the Community Centre. The Library consulted with the District of Tumbler Ridge, referred to the Libraries Act, BCLTA and more, but the legislation in place was unclear and still not yet updated to refer to operations during a pandemic. We ultimately were able to re-open on June 11, when the Community Centre was partially re-opened to the public with a safety plan in place.

TECHNOLOGY GRANT

Our Library received its' technology grant soon after our doors were closed to the public due to COVID-19. We received a monetary grant, as well as access to certain programs and a computer consultant. After much discussion, the Library decided the most effective use of the monetary grant would be to procure hotspots to lend out to clients, free of charge, to provide reliable Internet access. Currently, 1/3 of families in Tumbler Ridge do not have reliable internet access. We felt this was the best use of the funds for our community and in line with the first strategy of the Ministry of Education's Libraries and Literacy Branch's Strategic Plan to improve access for British Columbians.

The Library reached out to Telus to purchase the hotspots, intending to use the remainder of grant funds to pay the subscription fees. As we have partnered with Telus in the past, they surprised us by donating the hotspots, which freed up even more grant funding, which we have deferred to 2021. The hotspot program was launched in early 2021. We are greatly appreciative towards the province for the additional funding, as well as Telus, who has made it possible to provide reliable internet access to our community. We have reported on our plans to use the money and will report further next year once we have implemented our new services.

COVID-19 AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Tumbler Ridge Public Library began 2020 as usual, averaging 200 in person visits per day and getting organized to start a new year of Library services and programs. In March, everything came to a screeching halt, as the Library was closed to the public, along with the rest of the Community Centre and District of Tumbler Ridge buildings, due to COVID-19. Senior staff was eventually allowed to return to the Library, without opening to the public, while enforcing social distancing. Pages and clerks were laid off, only to return June 11, when we were able to re-open, albeit at reduced hours.

Several challenges immediately surfaced: How do we keep staff and clients safe? How do we provide client services? Can clients return items? Confusion reigned. As new guidelines emerged from Federal and Provincial governments, as well as WorkSafe BC and the Public Health office, we were able to slowly plan a re-opening. Plexiglass was installed, Personal Protective Equipment was acquired for staff, signage and cleaning

supplies were obtained. In the meantime, we devised a plan about how to best serve our clients during these unprecedented times.

While closed, the Library continued to get calls from patrons asking for books, DVDs, printing or faxing. We extended due dates and eliminated fines since the Book Return was unavailable due to its' location. Staff prepared and modified programs and cancelled those that required on-site gatherings. Non-contact home delivery become more and more popular, and clients were asked to keep materials at home, as it was unclear during the early stages of the pandemic whether the virus was transmitted on surfaces or how long it survived on those surfaces.

In September, to further protect staff and the public and to ensure that the Library could remain open in the event of a COVID exposure event, Library staff were divided into two separate cohorts. Each cohort worked at the Library, then from home on alternate days, meaning there would be staff available if one cohort became ill or was forced to isolate.

The crown jewel of our online programming was, as previously mentioned, our Summer Reading Club program. We surpassed the previous year's attendance by 20-30%! By engaging participants with daily videos and providing 2 daily crafts (dropped off on a weekly basis), we were able to offer a different form of structured literacy programming for children and offer families a fun, new way to interact with each other.

The main, overwhelming trend we saw during this pandemic, has been people's need to interact with others. Until it was all taken away, we did not realize how much we needed and craved routine. Our online programming numbers signaled to us our clients' desire to be part of a community and to interact with others. This was confirmed upon re-opening. Many of our early clients were those who live alone. Staff spent a lot of time speaking with those whose isolation had destabilized their lives. Just allowing them the novelty of interacting with a person in real time was clearly important.

CONCLUSION

We all grew up with libraries, those places to go to discover new books, new worlds, new information. Andrew Carnegie saw libraries as the great social equalizer. Years ago, it was rare for people to own books. Knowledge was held by the rich, the elite. Just over 100 years ago, Carnegie decided to change that. As one of the elite, he realized that libraries were a place where citizens could go in the evening to make themselves better: common worker by day, intellectual by night. He funded 3000 libraries which became known as 'Palaces for the people'.

Times change, and libraries aren't only that anymore. While they are still great repositories for knowledge, they also provide access to that knowledge from home, via computer. There are people who do not have computers, internet or who do not know how to use computers and libraries have moved to meet this role, too. But they are more than that. Somewhere along the line, libraries have become a keystone in the social infrastructure of our communities. Social infrastructure is the shared space where people can hang out and interact. That place that improves the quality of life for residents. That place that changes simply 'where you live' to where you LIVE. These are places like schools, churches, parks and recreation facilities. And libraries.

These places bind us together. They are the glue that makes this town a community and not merely a place where people gather. When we neglect this social infrastructure, we grow more isolated. If we have no soccer pitch where kids can gather in spring, we have no place for parents to gather. To discuss, to disseminate news and ideas. To find out what is happening in the lives of others who share this place we call home.

And the Library? Is one of the most important. While the arena is a place where folks can gather for the mutual benefit of our physical bodies, and the churches and other places of worship are places we can meet for spiritual advancement, the library is a place where members of the community can go to spark their intellect as individuals and as groups. Where children can gather to play games on the computer or read, where parents can bring their infants for a fun, free program. Where the unemployed can come for help with their resumes. It is no longer just a repository for books (indeed, if it ever was just that), but a foundation of the community where many still gather for the betterment of themselves and of the community.

Libraries have become the places that make a community. We have evolved from being a place where you can borrow books and maybe use the computer, to also being the place that you turn to when you need to fill out a social assistance form or have someone help you make a resume and post it online. We have tried our best to keep up with the times to keep providing that wealth of knowledge; we are more interactive (we literally bring items to people's homes!), we are a social agency. Library reference work was initially finding an answer to a query that was straightforward and specific, like for a book report, but now, it entails all aspects of clients' lives. We not only provide intellectual stimulation and diversion; we also provide a social network to help clients meet needs on every level of their lives.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula Coutts

Head Librarian

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: TUMBLER RIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: $8158

Area of Need	Outcome	Metrics	Strategic Links	Actions	Collaborative Links	Timeframe	Project Budget	In-Kind/Leveraged funds	Comments
Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.) **Wi-Fi antenna**	Provide more reliable external, after hours access to our Wi-Fi	During COVID-19 pandemic and reduced hours this will allow people to access Wi-Fi more reliably from outside the Library, and after hours	Supports the provincial strategic priority to improve access for British Columbians	Boost our Wi-Fi by relocating existing antenna and adding another at the other end of the Library	Will investigate locating an antenna in a different part of the community centre (where Library is located at one end) in order to broaden access	Before end of 2020	$200 for hardware	Existing Library budget will pay for cost of IT technician to do the work.	
Digital programming **Insta360 cameras**	Build digital library of local trails, hikes and other natural attractions including dinosaur trackways, etc.	Enable residents who are unable to take the hikes themselves due to physical or other limitations to enjoy our beautiful community and features	Advancing citizen engagement and, during COVID pandemic and afterward, provide digital access to local attractions and activities	Purchase Insta360 cameras (2) in order to allow volunteers to collect raw video for development into a useable digital product for use by library clients	We are partnering with the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark (UNESCO), Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation and the District of Tumbler Ridge to develop this in connection with our Virtual Reality project	Hope to have something ready for Councillors to take to UBCM in September 2021. This will be an ongoing project. We will start this winter (maybe some ice climbing) and continue as the seasons change.	$1400 for 2 cameras that will resist rain and other bad weather conditions. The project will cost more than $50,000 but that funding is from multiple sources	Library staff and community volunteers will do the filming. Existing library budget will cover most of the editing and production costs. Other groups in the partnership will also contribute.	
Patron software upgrades **Multimedia PC and software**	Provide access to specialized software that most small businesses and individuals will not purchase on their own.	Adobe Suite and other software will allow public (and staff) to create PDFs, video, animation, graphics. This will create a software 'makerspace'.	Supports the priority to improve access for British Columbians, builds capacity and advances citizen engagement.	Create computer 'makerspace' with a new multimedia PC loaded with diverse, specialized software.	District of Tumbler Ridge (Economic Development Officer) is working on developing a small business coop space for small businesses to use without each of them having to rent commercial space. This tool could be easily accessed and used by these individuals in addition to our staff and regular clients.	Before end of 2020, then adding software as new is developed or interest is expressed	$1400 for PC with software.	Software is available through TechSoup at reduced cost since we are a charity. Library staff time is covered in existing budget as is time for the IT technician to set up the system. DTR may also use/promote this workstation.	

Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.) **Portable hotspots**	Provide loanable hotspots to allow residents to access Internet. Some places in Tumbler Ridge do not have reliable Internet access and/or there are no ports available through Telus (our only provider currently)	Allow clients to borrow hotspots to help reduce barriers to digital inclusion and equity for clients who are 'shut out' of the internet. Gives them access when they need to a specific course or meeting or for entertainment.	Improves access for British Columbians, builds capacity and advances citizen engagement.	Purchase 5-10 portable hotspots then purchase as much data as we can afford.	We had numerous discussions with lower level Telus employees, finally ended up having a conversation with a manager who immediately offered us 5 hotspots and data at no charge!	November 2020	$0 I included this project here because it will affect the most clients and be the most talked about.	Library will pay for staff time and will incorporate the loan and maintenance of the devices into our regular loan policies.	
Patron hardware upgrades (public computers, printers, etc.) **Public workstations**	3 public computers are currently using Linux software as they are not strong enough to run Microsoft OS	Provide public access to more familiar software, increasing computer use in the Library.	Improve access for British Columbians, builds capacity.	Purchase 3 new public computers and install MS Office on each of them as we have on our other public PCs.	This will enhance one of our regular services since the attempt to have Linux has only frustrated both staff and clients, resulting in virtually no use of these workstations.	By end of December 2020	$1250	Library will pay for IT technician to set up and install these new workstations. They will be added in addition to the regular 3 computer annual upgrade, resulting in 6 new public computers!	
Staff and public hardware upgrade **NAS with spare bays**	Ability to safely and securely back up Library data. Space can also be offered to other local non profits.	Library staff work and email will be safely stored providing better security.	Builds capacity	Purchase and install NAS and offer extra space to non profit organizations that are unable to purchase their own reliable, secure backup	We will partner with organizations like the non-profit daycare that is in the community centre, the global geopark and other groups.	By end of December 2020 then ongoing as groups join.	$1600	Library will pay for initial installation since we need to improve our existing method of backup and retention.	
Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.) **Loanable devices, likely IPads or Mini IPads**	Loanable devices help reduce barriers to digital inclusion and provide equity for clients who rely on the library for access to computers and the internet	Increase public computing in the library. We are currently considering whether to include a SIM card in these devices to allow access to Internet via cell networks in addition to device.	Improve access for British Columbians.	Purchase 3-5 IPads or IPad minis, quantity will depend on price negotiated	We will ask Telus about providing SIM cards and access to data under the same service as they are providing for the portable hotspots.	By February 2021	$2308	We will buy as many as possible for the remaining amount. May buy more portable hotspots instead, depending on their popularity.	