



MARCH 1, 2021

2020 PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT

POWELL RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

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POWELL RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

100-6975 Alberni St.

Introduction

Powell River is located on the Upper Sunshine Coast, between the mountains and the Salish Sea. The Powell River Public Library serves the City of Powell River, the qathet Regional District and the Tla'amin Nation-- approximately twenty thousand people. Powell River is statistically an older community, the average age is over 50. Powell River is located in the Traditional Territory of the Tla'amin Nation, this area of the coast has been the home of the Coast Salish peoples for thousands of years. The City of Powell River was established in the early 1900s around the pulp mill and logging industry. With the shift away from jobs in large production business, Powell River and the region have been focused on economic revitalization. Encouraging tourism and new industries in the community is a local priority.

Strategic plan

PRPL Board of Trustees approved a new strategic plan in the first quarter of 2020. The new plan was an opportunity to use our experience in the new library to look forward. PRPL began the process of strategic planning in the third quarter of 2019. Both the Board and staff came together for a facilitated, full day session in December. The new plan has five strategic priorities:

- Organizational Strength
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Communication and Marketing
- Stable Funding
- Emerging Technology

While the pandemic and safety training took the bulk of staff energies in 2020, the new plan did help to guide decisions around the restoration of library services.

2020 Community Shift

Like all organizations serving the public, PRPL navigated the transition to a virtual environment to engage with our patrons during the pandemic. When our physical doors closed, our staff turned their focus to virtual programs, digital collections and remote technology support. As the pandemic progressed, we were able to continue to support patrons more easily remotely and developed procedure to safely engage with patrons in-person.

On the heels of a banner year for use of digital collections, we are pleased that use continued to grow through 2020. At the end of the year, circulation of the digital collections was up by 49% over 2019 and up 88% as compared to 2017. Not only did total circulation grow, the total number of new patrons and the digital circulations per patron increased dramatically.

Being located in the centre of the community and providing an inviting space that is designed for many types of use, the library had seen consistently high numbers since opening its doors in 2017. During 2020 use of the collections returned to roughly 63% of 2019 numbers but has not seen the foot traffic of previous years. While quicker visits, lower occupancy and virtual program attendance are the norm during the pandemic, the public and staff are looking forward to being able to encourage the in-person activities that brought the space to life before the pandemic.

Discussion

Improving Access

Powell River strategic goals:

Emerging Technology - We believe providing access to appropriate technology and programming enhances the ability of our patrons to engage in a changing world. **Specific goals:** programming, makerspace and technology plan.

| PROGRAM / SERVICE | OUTPUT | OUTCOME | PARTNERS |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|------------------|
| Public Wireless Network Improvements | High speed broadband Internet service improved. Wireless network and public computers are on a 1Gb Fibre connection. Upgraded wireless access points were also upgraded to increase the range of the network. | Streaming video is possible in library meeting rooms and in the public spaces surrounding the building. Connectivity in our building was poor before the upgrade due to the layout, hardware and proximity to other networks. Outside the library, people in the parking lot, at the bus stop and on the patio all now have access to fast reliable Internet. | Libraries Branch |
| OverDrive Advantage Collection | Developed OverDrive Advantage collection adding 232 titles. | Total circulations increased by 49%. Circulations per user increased over ten percent. New OverDrive users increased by 58%. | Libraries Branch |

Building Capacity

Powell River strategic goals:

Organizational Strength - We believe that better communication and a focused training and support strategy build positive relationships within our team and help us respond to our changing community.

Specific goals: Strengthen work relationships, improve internal communications, training needs analysis, societal issues, technology, training plans.

| PROGRAM / SERVICE | OUTPUT | OUTCOME | PARTNERS |
|---|---|---|--|
| Improved staff training on safety in relation to COVID-19 pandemic. | Establishment of procedures and policies that create a safe workplace and environment for the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. | Adherence to safety measures in place which follow health authority guidance. Improved awareness of government and health authority resources to refer patrons to. | City of Powell River |
| Public Computer Restart Session | PRPL staff presented work done to provide safe access to public computers to public library staff across the province. | Promoted sharing of safety procedure between libraries. Reduce staff time at other locations for the creation of safety procedure. Improve staff confidence in procedure and safety. | ABCPLD, BCLA, Burns Lake PL, West Vancouver PL, Vancouver PL |
| Librarian's Guide to Homelessness Training | All staff completed training that promotes empathy and conflict resolution in challenging situations. | Improved confidence in ability to deliver library services well in challenging scenarios. Continued engagement with | |

Advancing Citizen Engagement

Powell River strategic goals:

Emerging Technology - We believe providing access to appropriate technology and programming enhances the ability of our patrons to engage in a changing world. **Specific goals:** programming, makerspace and technology plan.

Collaboration and Partnerships - We believe in pursuing strategic connections to enhance our services, create opportunities and build a culture of knowledge sharing. **Specific goals:** Needs analysis, explore local partnerships.

Programs and Services

| PROGRAM | OUTPUT | OUTCOME | PARTNERS |
|---|---|---|----------|
| Public computer access during COVID-19 pandemic | Safety procedure and barriers in place to restore access to two public computers, scanning, printing and copy from June 2020. Six public computers available by December 2020. | Improved access to the Internet for people with limited access to computing services. Printing/scanning/copying available to public. | |

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Enhancing Governance

Powell River strategic goals:

Organizational Strength - We believe that better communication and a focused training and support strategy build positive relationships within our team and help us respond to our changing community.

Specific goals: Strengthen work relationships, improve internal communications, training needs analysis, societal issues, technology, training plans.

| PROGRAM | OUTPUT | OUTCOME | PARTNERS |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
| Trustee recruitment | Improved posting language for clear Trustee recruitment | Two open seats filled | City of Powell River, qathet Regional District |

Technology Grant - Final Report

The Technology Grant supported the growth of two valuable services for the Powell River Public Library- access to wireless high-speed Internet and access to eBooks and eAudio. While lendable connectivity goals were included in our interim report, this project may have a greater impact if implemented later in 2021 and will rely on alternate funding. A report on connectivity challenges in the more rural parts of our service area in the qathet Regional District is anticipated by Summer 2021. We hope to use this report to launch a pilot version of this project as equitably as is possible. In lieu of spending on the Lendable Connectivity project, the OverDrive Advantage collection will be grown in a stable way through 2021.

Improved Public Network

The wireless network at the public library was installed when the space opened in 2017 and has presented challenges such as poor connectivity in certain physical locations, poor connectivity for older devices and slow speed when connected in certain areas. To improving the network, the overall speed of the connection was first upgraded to 1Gb fibre. This improved speed, but did not resolve the issues seen with 'dead spots' or areas of poor connectivity within the library. To improve this, the access points were also upgraded so that connectivity in the library is more consistent. Given the changing needs of patrons during the pandemic, the focus expanded to include access outside of the library as well. Patrons are now able to connect to the Internet from the areas frequented outside the building-- the patio, parking lot and bus stop.

Access to eBooks and eAudio

Use of eBooks including eAudio, has out paced the available collection and long wait times had been the most common barrier to use voiced by patrons using OverDrive. The Technology Grant funds have enabled the launch and significant growth of the Advantage collection locally. To date, PRPL has added 232 items which generated 3,091 circulations in 2020-- nearly ten percent of our total OverDrive use. This collection has enabled us to respond quickly to local needs including school requests, book clubs and local interest materials.

Growth in eBook use has increased in 2020 in a variety of ways. Our total circulation was 49% higher than in 2019. Total items borrowed per patron was up by ten percent and the biggest success we saw in digital collection use was that new users of OverDrive grew by 58% in 2020. Over five percent of our service area is an active user of this collection.

Summary

Opportunities

Funding opportunities in 2020 were different from previous years and it is anticipated that the increases may not continue in future years in a reliable way. The Library Technology Grant enabled improvements to our infrastructure and collections which we would have been challenged to do otherwise. Funding from Young Canada Works was approved for our Summer Reading Club Assistant where Canada Summer Jobs was not approved in 2019 causing a shortfall.

Challenges

The digital divide grew in 2020. Patrons who may have previously been supported one-on-one to 'start from scratch' with their technology or device learning, were supported at a distance or by phone which complicates the learning process significantly.

Operational revenue has decreased since March 2020. Library meeting rooms and photocopies generate revenue which all but evaporated in 2020. It is likely this will continue well into 2021.

The cost of janitorial services increased due to the requirements for cleaning public spaces. There is significant staff time allocated through the day for cleaning and tracking cleaning.

Impacts of COVID-19

The most direct impact on library operations has been from the physical distancing requirements and reduced occupancy limit in the library space. Staff have shifted to working from multiple locations to ensure safe operations. Safety protocol, especially during the second and third quarters of 2020, made routine procedures increasingly time consuming. The constant change of procedure and focus on health and safety demanded a significant amount of administrative and staff time.

Our space use shifted significantly as well, with public space being reallocated for staff and storage use.

Areas of Focus

In assessing which in-person services to restart the priorities were:

- **Computing services**- limited access to computers, public Internet, and copy services for general public in service area
- **Physical materials** - not all patrons are able to access on eBooks, several groups voiced a need for children's materials
- **Physical space including** - limited access for general public in service area for indoor seating and washroom access

Virtual Programs

Library staff who coordinate programs were able to shift many of these online as early as late March following the closure of the physical library. Demand for technology support to ease the public transition to virtual communication tools grew quickly. The library delivered remote, one-on-one technology help immediately following the closure. Staff provided over 300 sessions in 2020. This support enabled a larger number of patrons to take advantage of other library services-- virtual programs, eBooks and resources.

Timeline

March 17, 2020 Physical library closed to the public. Staff begin to shift programming online and focus attention on enriching digital resources and remote support for technology and skill building.

March 30 - Our long standing Seniors' Memoir Writing group initiate virtual meetings.

May 1 - Read to Seniors is offered virtually to care homes across the community.

May 19 - Re-opened to the public with holds takeout service. Service was by appointment only. Hours were Monday to Friday: 10 am – 12 pm and 1 pm – 3 pm. Items were pre-checked out to patrons with

POWELL RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY 2020 PLGR

an increased loan period of six weeks. All returned items were being returned to the outside drop box and were quarantined for 72-hours.

June - Summer Reading Club supported more families in 2020 than in previous years. Remote programs focused on providing a virtual gathering and an analogue activity to pair it with.

June 15 - Continued scheduled hold pickups, but added public computer access by appointment only. Two public computers were available for use. Computer sessions were 45-minutes in length, with no time extensions. Staff were able to offer tech help only at a distance or with a plexi barrier. Remote tech help was available.

July 3 - Restored public holds access. Patrons were allowed into the library only to access the public holds shelf. Loan period for all items was changed to four weeks.

July 15 - Restored in-person browsing access to patrons limited occupancy. Two more public computers were made available.

July 20 - Public hours increased to Monday to Friday: 10 am – 6 pm.

August 19 - November 18 - Bubble Storytime launches in local parks under new health and safety requirements.

Powell River Public Library

Interim Report for the 2020 Technology Grant Award

Contact – Rebecca Burbank, Chief Librarian

With the generous funding from the Library Technology Grant the Powell River Public Library is focusing on the connectivity and eBook access needs of both an urban and rural population and the complications that have arisen during the pandemic. The local challenges faced have included poor connectivity within the Library and in the adjacent outdoor areas as well as variable access to the Internet in residences across the community. Patrons living in our service area experience a range of connectivity barriers associated with a lack of available broadband coverage, gaps in digital literacy and financial limitations.

To improve connectivity of the public network at the Library, the bandwidth was increased to 1G in May 2020 using the Library operating budget. The access points will need to be upgraded and relocated to further improve the range of the network in outdoor areas and meeting rooms. To support connectivity in homes without Internet access, PRPL is in the planning phase of a lendable connectivity program. Community partners have expressed a need for better connectivity in homes to support online learning, remote work and remote service access. This need has only been exacerbated by the shift to virtual and remote service that the pandemic has driven.

The Library has seen a dramatic rise in eBook use in the past two years, this accelerated in April, 2020. Patron frustration over long wait times for popular titles underscored the need for PRPL to launch and Overdrive Advantage collection to support remote readers. Funding from IslandLink Library Federation and the LTG have supported this growth.

2020 LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY GRANT REPORTING FORM: POWELL RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Total Technology Grant Amount: \$15,909

| Area of Need | Outcome | Metrics | Strategic Links | Actions | Collaborative Links | Timeframe | Project Budget | In-Kind/Leveraged funds | Comments |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|----------------|---|----------|
| Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.) Upgrade WiFi access points | Improved WiFi connectivity and range in the Library and surrounding area specifically the adjacent patio and parking lot. | Faster connections to WiFi. Access to public WiFi from outside library walls improved (ability to connect regularly from the parking lot). | Improving Access Advancing Citizen Engagement | Wire new locations. Purchase more robust access points. | | Wiring completed September 2020. Purchase and install complete by November 2020. | \$5,500 | Library operating budget funding (2) Telus Fiber connections. | |
| Electronic collections (licensing) Improve access to eBooks and eAudio | Develop an Overdrive Advantage collection to improve local access to eBooks and eAudio. | Circulation of Overdrive collection will continue to rise. | Improving Access Building Capacity | Following the collection development policy, purchase: items with high holds, requested items and items of local interest. | | Launched collection in Summer 2020, continued purchasing through December 2020. | \$5,409 | IslandLink Library Federation digital resources grant. | |
| Connectivity (internet speed, connection capacity, etc.) Improve patron connectivity from home | Pilot lendable connectivity. Purchase 5 hotspots with data plan for lending to support patrons without an internet connection in their homes. | Patrons without access to internet in their homes are borrowing the hotspots. All devices are in use. Holds list to provide a better sense of need and support expansion of project if justifiable. | Improving Access Advancing Citizen Engagement | Assess offers from carriers. Finalize partnerships. Promote and educate. | Residents of the Tla'amin Nation and SD47 administration expressed need for connectivity in homes. | Research device and plan complete in October 2020. Research community needs, anticipated completion date November 2020. Delivery plan complete by November 2020. Launch by January 2021. | \$5,000 | | |