



PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT (PLGR) 2019

The **Cariboo Regional District Library** offers public library services to residents of the Cariboo Regional District, a predominantly rural area of more than 80,000 square kilometers located in north-central British Columbia. Approximately 41,000 of the Region's 64,000 residents live in or near rural communities. The remaining 24,000 residents live in the three urban municipalities of 100 Mile House, Williams Lake and Quesnel. Industry in the area is primarily ranching, logging, businesses related to the forest industry, small farming enterprises, and small-scale tourist enterprises.

Library Services is a function (or department) of the Cariboo Regional District. As such, it is one of only two integrated library systems in the province of British Columbia.

Library services are offered in twelve rural and three urban communities spread throughout the Region.

The twelve rural 'Community Branches' are open 2-3 days per week and are staffed by a community member hired by the Cariboo Regional District on a part-time basis. Most rural branches occupy rented space in community halls or schools. Three are in Cariboo Regional District buildings. One branch is co-located with a school library in an elementary school. Rural branches offer a wide variety of library services including a collection of books, and access to computers and wi-fi. Rural residents are fiercely loyal to their small community library branch and use it for most of their informational and recreational reading needs. They also occasionally visit the larger urban branches.

The three urban Branches are in the larger municipalities of Quesnel, Williams Lake and 100 Mile House and are open 5 days per week; including evenings and Saturdays. Each branch has a professional librarian, a library technician, a variety of library clerks, and part-time students. Urban branches offer a full slate of library services to their local urban populations but also are regional hubs for the surrounding rural areas.

An administrative office located at the center of the region (Williams Lake) offers centralized support services to the Branches including cataloguing, acquisitions, interlibrary loan, shipping, purchasing and administration. Staffing includes a variety of full-time and part-time positions including a professional librarian, a library technician and various levels of clerical staff.

Strategic Plan

As an integrated library, the Cariboo Regional District Library has not traditionally developed strategic plans separate from the Cariboo Regional District. Rather, the Library along with other Regional District services, annually develops a 5-year Business Plan that supports the Strategic Plan of the Cariboo Regional District. However, the 2019 Business Plan for Library Services included a goal to complete a Strategic Plan for the 2020-2024 period which will inform the Business Plan developed for each year. In 2019, staff analyzed data collected during the strategic planning process which included staff and public

consultation, an environmental scan, identification of trends, and examination of the strategic plans of the Library's major stakeholders. In late 2019, the Library adopted a new Strategic Plan with goals spread across a 4-year time period (2020-2024). Work on the goals and objectives developed for the plan will begin in 2020.

Other goals from the 2019 Business Plan included:

- Providing facility/equipment improvements to Area and Community Library Branches. Areas of focus included prioritizing viable projects that focus on access, safety, comfort, energy conservation, building aesthetics and which meet service delivery requirements. The main focus in 2019 was staff safety. Changes were made to Branches to improve staff safety including the installation of convex mirrors to increase the visibility of all interior areas, gates to discourage public access to staff areas, and the installation of hidden panic alarms behind circulation desks.
- Providing residents with improved access to digital content, including e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines, and video. After much discussion, first steps were taken to establish a committee of staff from various levels and locations to identify the requirements for a new library website and the possibilities for additional components that will improve access to the Library's digital services into the future. This information will define the scope of the website project, which is a major goal of the new Strategic Plan of the Library.
- Improve staff access to training in multiple formats. Staff were encouraged to access a list of pre-recorded library training sessions available through YouTube (such as those produced by the BC Libraries Cooperative on how to use the Library's integrated library system software). They were also encouraged to listen to webinars related to the services they offer, and to attend in-person training whenever it was available. Three Library Technicians and four Librarians attended the Beyond Hope Library Conference in Prince George. Thirty-four staff, from clerical to professional, were offered the opportunity to take a self-directed online course related to homelessness. Ten staff have completed the course. The remaining twenty-four staff will continue to work on the course into 2020.

Challenges

The challenges of providing library services in the region are typical of rural communities in a vast, sparsely populated geographic area. Cell service is generally only available along the Highway 97 corridor and is completely unavailable in most parts of the region. Similarly, high speed internet often is available only in urban areas and along certain transportation corridors. In many rural communities, the population is scattered across a large area, although people may visit a local community center for essential services. Many rural homes are located at some distance from the major transportation corridor in their area and have limited or no internet options. The library often offers the only easily accessible high-speed internet connection, and even that is a challenge in some communities. Even in urban centers where internet is readily available, free internet and wi-fi connections available at the library are vital to low-income and disadvantaged individuals.

In an age when society considers internet access a basic necessity, demand for the Library's internet services in some rural locations is beginning to exceed available bandwidth. Some locations are beginning to experience extra monthly usage charges as people use the library's internet/wi-fi accounts for all the things for which society requires internet access (accessing government services, staying in

touch with friends and family, downloading music and video, writing online exams, conducting research, doing homework assignments, paying bills, doing banking, accessing digital library services, and much more). The Library will soon need to consider either pursuing more expensive service agreements to meet these demands or limiting access to stay within available bandwidth.

Travel in rural areas, especially between November and May, can be unpredictable and precarious. This makes in-person training a challenge, leaving only a short window of opportunity each year for travel. Technological difficulties, such as poor cell and internet service, make online training just as challenging. This means that new library services and initiatives that are easily adopted in urban areas take longer to implement in rural areas as staff try to figure out how to navigate the access and training challenges involved with introducing new services when staff are scattered across such a large geographic area.

The long distances between communities means that annual shipping costs to transport goods are high, making participation in resource sharing expensive, even with Canada Post discounts. An emphasis on increased resource sharing between libraries, a service that has become incredibly popular with library users, continually challenges the budget. The provincial Resource Sharing Grant is very gratefully received to cover part of the cost of this very popular service.

Continually rising costs of digital resources are challenging the Materials budget and reduce the amount of funding left to spend on physical/print materials (ie. Print books, DVDs, and audio). Provincial funding helps the Library to provide both digital and print materials to an appreciative public.

Public libraries want their facilities to be the 'living room' of the community. The public has embraced this concept with enthusiasm. But it also has presented challenges, especially to library branches located in downtown 'inner city' areas. Inner city areas are not specific to large cities. They also exist in small towns. The social issues and challenges that tend to be concentrated in inner city areas tend to migrate into public library spaces located in those areas. Drug paraphernalia left in library bathrooms, surreptitious alcohol consumption in the library, patrons carrying concealed weapons (usually knives) into the library, damage in library bathrooms, cannabis/alcohol consumption in library outdoor areas, gang tagging and endless graffiti on outside walls are all real issues facing public library staff. An increase in these activities in recent years is becoming more and more challenging to deal with in our urban branches. Janitors, front-line public service staff, building maintenance staff and managers are all affected. The amount of library funding that needs to be redirected to building maintenance as a direct result of this trend is increasing every year. And the emotional toll on staff is also increasing.

Upgrades that focused on staff safety were made to library facilities in 2019. The changes resulted from recommendations made by safety audits conducted on Cariboo Regional District facilities. Convex mirrors were installed to provide better visibility throughout public areas, gates were installed to discourage public access to staff areas, and static panic alarms were installed behind circulation desks to supplement the free-ranging panic alarms already in use. One library made changes to its outdoor sitting area to discourage loitering by groups of people, especially overnight, as the area was having drug use and sanitation issues. Library staff at that location regularly receive complaints from library users who are reluctant to approach the entrance to the library because of exposure to foul language being used by groups congregated in the area between the parking lot and the library entrance. Measures taken so far have had some limited success. New plans for the space are being discussed that will return the space to the pleasant and safe place that it once was for library users to enjoy.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 1 – IMPROVING ACCESS

The Cariboo Regional District Library uses the Provincial Annual Operating Grant to ensure that similar library services are offered in rural areas as are offered in urban areas of the Region. Small rural library branches offer the use of computers, free wi-fi, access to systemwide digital and local print resources, and access resource sharing opportunities. Rural library branches enrich their communities by providing a focal point for human contact in rural communities where people do not live close to one another. Many of the services offered by the local library would not exist in these communities at all were it not for the presence of local public library branches. These services are highly valued as illustrated by the many comments made by rural residents during the most recent public consultation on library services.

“In our scattered and isolated community our very friendly little library is vital.”

“During the past four or five years I have found the Tatla Lake Library playing a crucial part of my life out in this remote rural community. The current CRD Library system makes me proud to be a taxpayer.”

LIBRARY PRIORITY 2 – DEVELOPING SKILLS

A goal of the 2019 Cariboo Regional District Library Business Plan was “to improve library staff access to training in multiple formats”.

Professional and para-professional staff took advantage of available funding to attend the 2019 Beyond Hope Library Conference held in Prince George, BC. Staff attended sessions on a wide variety of topics and brought that learning back to the staff in their respective branches.

Thirty-four frontline library staff members are taking advantage of a training opportunity to learn about homeless people and how to deal with homeless people who may display behavioural issues while visiting the library. This multi-session, self-directed online training began in 2019 and will continue into 2020. The goal of this training is to develop staff who understand why people act the way they do and who are empathetic to people who are unlike themselves and who lead lives unlike their own.

The Cariboo Regional District Library is trying to develop a ‘culture of learning’ amongst its staff. Offering ongoing learning opportunities to staff is an important step in realizing that goal. Staff who participate in lifelong learning and who are eager to develop new skills are more enthusiastic and transfer their enthusiasm to other staff, which encourages them to participate in new learning opportunities as well. The long-term goal is a more knowledgeable staff offering high level library service to people in their community so that the library becomes a valued part of each community.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 3 – COLLABORATING ON SHARED PROJECTS

The Cariboo Regional District Library regularly partners with a long list of local community groups. In 2019, the Library partnered with community groups located throughout the Cariboo Region. Some of these local groups used library-owned facilities to offer public programming either alone or in direct partnership with library staff. Some groups invited library staff to participate in their events held at other locations. Some groups invited the Library to have a presence in their group and attend regular

meetings because they share a common cause with the Library. Local businesses contributed prizes and food to events. Some community groups in rural areas rented space in their facilities to the Cariboo Regional District so a library branch can exist in their community.

- Partnerships with local businesses helped to offset the cost of prizes for children participating in the B.C. Summer Reading Club. Local businesses also provided in-kind donations of food and drink for the end-of-summer wrap up celebrations for the Summer Reading Club.
- Partnerships with local community associations resulted in a varied selection of events for members of the public to attend and enjoy both on library premises and throughout the community. In 2019 those events included Lego Club, Chess Club, Saturday Afternoon Movies, a Holiday Photo Booth, Let's Learn Libby (ebook downloading) workshops, Family Fest (held at a local elementary school), puppet shows at the library as part of the Downtown Williams Lake Winter Lights Festival, puppets and stories at Baby Fest – an event coordinated by the Women's Contact Society specifically for babies, photography lectures, local author readings and book signings in partnership with B.C. publishers and the local book store, and much more.

Working with local community groups and contributing to their work helps the Library to achieve its goal of becoming a visible and valued presence in the community.

The Library also regularly partners with other libraries on both a regional and provincial level. The Cariboo Regional District Library is an active member of the North Central Library Federation (NCLF), the Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD) and the BC Libraries Cooperative.

Results from successful Library partnerships in 2019 included:

- Partnered with the Cariboo Chilcotin Partners for Literacy and the North Central Library Federation to provide cost-effective books and CDs to newborns through the Books for Babies initiative.
- Partnered with the BC Libraries Cooperative and other public libraries in BC to obtain significant price reductions in the cost of library cards and library materials processing supplies.
- Partnered with other public libraries belonging to the NCLF to share the cost to hire a touring magician to perform in local library branches using the theme of the annual B.C. Summer Reading Club aimed at children aged 4-12.
- Partnered with other libraries in northern BC to access affordable training, specifically to the ongoing online course, "Librarians Guide to Homelessness".
- A \$1000 grant from the North Central Library Federation helped to offset travel expenses for library staff to attend a library conference in 2019. This is important because library conferences offer quality professional development opportunities for staff (particularly paraprofessionals) and may be the only event they are able to attend that year.
- Significant price reductions in the cost of digital resources (e-books, etc.) were negotiated on behalf of libraries by the BC Libraries Cooperative and by the North Central Library Federation.

Every dollar saved because of partnerships is valuable because it extends the local library budget so funds can be spent on other initiatives. Sponsored programs offer valuable experiences to children they might not otherwise have the chance to experience. Partnerships with other libraries and library

agencies strengthen the bonds between the staff involved in the partnership – which often leads to other partnership opportunities, which leads to stronger bonds, and so on. Regardless of the type of partnership and whether it benefits staff development or directly benefits the public, the final result is better and more equitable service to library customers at a local level.

LIBRARY PRIORITY 4 – ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

In 2019, staff analyzed information gathered from the strategic planning process to ensure that the goals identified for the library system for the 2020-2024 period are evidence-based and relevant to the communities they serve. The Cariboo Regional District Library System finalized its Strategic Plan for 2020-2024. Work on the identified goals will begin immediately in 2020.

SUMMARY

The Cariboo Regional District Library uses provincial funding in a myriad of ways: to ensure that rural residents have access to the same high quality of library services as their urban counterparts, to work with other libraries and agencies to take advantage of efficiencies of funding to provide as many high-quality services as are available, and to provide its staff with the professional development opportunities that are necessary to ensure that they are informed about and able to offer high quality library services.

Provincial library funding continues to play an important role in the variety of library services CRDL staff offer to residents of and visitors to the Cariboo Region.

Respectfully submitted,

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Cariboo Regional District Library