

## PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANTS REPORT 2019 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.<sup>1</sup> It is also a city with an increasing aging population, with the number of seniors expected to grow by 51% by 2050.<sup>2</sup>

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. Although growth in homelessness has slowed, in 2019 the homeless count increased again by 2% over 2018<sup>3</sup>. In terms of income, Vancouver continues to be one of the more polarized cities in Canada, with the top 10% of the population taking home 34% of adjusted after-tax income,<sup>4</sup> while one in five Vancouverites is forecast to experience poverty.<sup>5</sup> The city's high real-estate prices pose significant housing challenges for residents.

VPL's programs and services are popular and heavily used by the community. In 2019, VPL recorded 6.4 million in-person visits and over 7.4 million visits to vpl.ca. Patrons borrowed 9.8 million digital and physical items, received answers to over 670,000 reference questions and attended over 8,500 programs for children, teens, and adults. In addition, patrons borrowed from our 287-piece musical instrument collection nearly 2,500 times.

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<sup>1</sup> "Census Profile, 2016 Census" Statistics Canada. Retrieved Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 from: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMACA&Code1=933&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&Data=Count&SearchText=Vancouver&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All>

<sup>2</sup> City of Vancouver. Strategic Planning & City Building Report. September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Vancouver Homeless Count 2019. Homeless Services Association of BC, BC Non-Profit Housing Association and Urban Matters CCC. Retrieved February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/vancouver-homeless-count-2019-final-report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> City of Vancouver. Strategic Planning & City Building Report. September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> City of Vancouver. Strategic Planning & City Building Report. September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

Our 2017-2019 Strategic Plan outlines our commitment to continue providing our core services while evolving to meet the changing needs of our community. We identified four strategic outcomes grounded in VPL's mission, vision and values: Learning, Creativity & Innovation; Access & Equity; Sharing & Collaboration; and Organizational Strength. VPL is soon to roll out our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. Through community consultations, staff conversations, and environmental scans, we verified that our previous strategies put us on the right path and helped us to identify new and emerging areas for us to focus our efforts.

In 2019, we focused on achieving our strategic goals by improving digital accessibility, expanding digital literacy offerings for children, deepening our partnerships with local Indigenous organizations, and broadening the application of our outcomes-based evaluation tools. These initiatives are detailed in the report and continue our momentum toward VPL's vision of an informed, engaged and connected city.

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## ***PRIORITY 1 – IMPROVING ACCESS***

### **Website Accessibility and Multilingual Updates**

In 2019, VPL aimed to develop more inclusive web services. To achieve this, we undertook two projects: the implementation of a multilingual translation tool on our website, and the optimization of accessibility features to facilitate navigation for people with perceptual disabilities.

#### ***Website Language Translation Tool***

The purpose of this project was to enable everyone, regardless of their preferred language, to navigate our website without barriers and to use our online resources as easily as possible.

Following extensive research, we chose to use Google Translate. Google Translate is a machine translation service that is compatible with our content management system and respects the privacy of our users and our server security protocols. Google Translate allows for immediate, dynamic translation of our English website to the 16 other languages available in our multilingual collections. When a patron visits [vpl.ca](http://vpl.ca), they simply click the translate menu at the top of the page, select their preferred language, and most website features are translated.

Feedback from staff and patrons was very positive. One staff member reported:

“On Saturday I registered three new patrons who had recently moved from Japan. It was so instantly rewarding to make a click and have the entire website translate into Japanese. The tentative new patrons changed into confident users in a matter of seconds. They were so genuinely surprised and thrilled that this feature exists.”

The use of our language translation services has been steady, with 5% of our website views from multilingual browsers translated during the first 6 months after we launched. The top five most frequently translated languages are Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, and French.

### *Accessibility Optimization Project*

We reviewed our website and identified some gaps for people interested in accessibility services. The existing information on VPL's accessibility services was incomplete and difficult to find, and web design layouts made it difficult for people using screen readers to get the information they need.

Following extensive research, testing and consultation with our accessibility coordinator, we:

- added links to our accessible services to the navigation menu
- simplified the content on our Accessible Services section and improved the layout to optimize the experience of people who rely on screen readers
- took steps to promote accessibility information across our site – an example is the addition of accessibility features on each of our branch pages

The changes above, which were made in compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), complete the scope of the first phase of the project. We will now conduct user-testing of these changes, optimize other sections of the website to improve navigation, and further our work to achieve Level AAA WCAG compliance so that all visitors can enjoy an easy, seamless experience of our digital branch.

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## ***PRIORITY 2 – DEVELOPING SKILLS***

### **Enhanced Digital Literacy Offerings and New Digital Literacy Resources for Children**

In the past year, VPL's Children and Teen Services expanded programming focused on providing a child/teen-led environment where children, teens and families can explore technology in a safe, supported setting.

Programs aim to increase participant awareness of, and comfort with, various technology types; support using technology for independent content creation; and communicate evidence-based best-practices around privacy, digital footprint management, screen time impacts, and age-appropriate app/digital tool selection.

VPL's comprehensive digital literacy programming for children now includes a number of new or revised programs:

- Sphero programs: children learn how to program using easy-to-learn coding on iPads to control the Sphero robot and guide it through mazes and other creative challenges.
- Coding Awbie Adventures: introduces coding skills to children by combining digital exploration with tactile material manipulation – teaching children logic skills and problem solving.
- Coding Buddies: pairs teens with younger children to learn how to use some of the latest iPad apps while building mentorship relationships around coding concepts.
- Coding Buddies DIY Video Game: children explore the world of coding and design a level of a video game with a teen buddy using iPads and Bloxels, a hands-on platform to design video game characters and settings.
- Kids Creation Station: children connect with each other while exploring the creative tools in VPL's Inspiration Lab.

We also continued to offer a number of well-established digital literacy offerings for children including:

- Tablet Tales: an early literacy focused storytime with tablet/app content focused on developmentally appropriate app awareness and best practices for parents of children under 5 years.
- Parent's Time Out – Apps for your Little One: teaches screen time management based on health evidence, app awareness and use, privacy and VPL digital tools for children.
- Library Skills Workshops: teaches middle grade and teen students about digital research, online privacy and safety, citation, resource evaluation, and digital library resources in a staff-led mobile-hardware environment.

The evaluation of these programs identified key outcomes for parents/caregivers. These outcomes include feeling more confident in managing the screen use of their preschool aged children and understanding how to use apps and digital content to support the attachment and development of their children. Children and teens who participate in digital literacy programming report increased comfort with coding concepts, increased awareness of apps and coding software, increased confidence in managing online privacy and safety, and increased awareness of and intent to use VPL digital resources/virtual research supports.

Looking ahead, VPL will continue to provide digital literacy programs that have a proven record of success while working with partners to deliver digital and tech programs that are aligned with our mandate and enable us to deliver more than we can with current funding.

**Connection to Kith and Kin**

With partners, VPL staff developed the Connection to Kith and Kin: Indigenous Ancestry Search program in response to a need identified and brought to VPL by the local urban Indigenous community. The program brings together federal, municipal and community organizations committed to connecting Indigenous people with information on their family history. VPL partnered with Aboriginal Life in Vancouver Enhancement Society, North West Indigenous Council, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Britannia Community Services Society, and Our Place to create this program. Based on community recommendations, we also approached the Indian Residential School Survivors Society to provide cultural support for the workshops. The Connection to Kith and Kin program contributes to VPL's strategic goal of addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Staff from VPL and LAC cross-trained on genealogy resources, search strategies, and trauma-informed practice. Over the course of 2019, four VPL librarians delivered the workshops alongside two archivists from LAC and a resolution health support worker from the Indian Residential School Survivors Society.

The goals of this program are to:

- deliver genealogy workshops that are accessible and relevant to the urban Indigenous community,
- provide a trauma-informed, culturally supportive environment for personal growth, and
- support and maintain connections with partner organizations and community members.

Between March and December 2019, approximately 56 individuals participated in the program. Some participants continued their research outside the program, and returned when they needed specific help. An estimated 90% of participants in each session left with new information about their families, and approximately 80% of participants who had further informational requests for LAC received additional documentation in follow up sessions.

As a result of the Connection to Kith and Kin program, many participants connected with their families, home communities, and other urban Indigenous people at gatherings. VPL has received an abundance of participant feedback highlighting the immense value and impact this service has for urban Indigenous patrons. Examples:

- *"There's so much information. It gets very confusing. But it seems like the more time I spend, the easier it gets. I feel a lot more confident being able to read this [family history chart and related documents]."*

- *“I could get status because my relatives have it, but I’m not doing [this research] for that. I just want to know the truth of who I am.”*

VPL is committed to integrating this program into its Information Services in a way that is culturally appropriate and supportive.

### **Let’s Talk about Reconciliation**

Working with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, together with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, the Indigenous Matters Committee of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, the National Film Board of Canada and Library and Archives Canada, VPL hosted the Let’s Talk About Reconciliation film series consisting of a launch event in 2018 and a further three events in 2019. Each event featured a local Indigenous curator, who selected National Film Board of Canada films by Indigenous filmmakers.

The goals of the Let’s Talk about Reconciliation project are to:

- engage local Indigenous filmmakers and curators and connect them with a library audience,
- facilitate a lively and engaging community conversation about reconciliation, and
- expose local residents to Indigenous films available through the National Film Board of Canada.

For the 2019 series, we invited each of the local First Nations - the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh - to curate the three events. At each event, audience members heard from local elders, viewed films and participated in a facilitated community dialogue about reconciliation.

All three events reached a broad audience of library patrons, and featured nuanced discussion and sharing about reconciliation. Over 200 people engaged in discussion and committed to personal action that furthers the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Many attendees spoke of how much they had enjoyed the films, and referenced them in their conversations. Attendees reported that after attending the events, they felt a sense of inspiration and intended to seek out further opportunities to engage with the topic of reconciliation through art, information, resources and dialogue.

VPL’s relationships with the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations were strengthened through the work of planning this series. As well, the series forged relationships among community members and filmmakers.

Film screenings provide a unique entry point into new perspectives, and offer a jumping-off point to kick-start conversations about the legacy of residential schools and colonization. This process has provided us with a model of how to facilitate these conversations in a constructive and interactive way, in collaboration with Indigenous curators and communities.

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#### ***PRIORITY 4 – ENHANCING GOVERNANCE***

##### **Project Outcome**

In 2018, VPL participated in an InterLINK Working Group to test the Project Outcome evaluation tool. In response to the success of the pilot, and to understand the wider applicability of Project Outcome across VPL programs, the tool was tested with a broader set of programs in 2019.

The Project Outcome tool was used to evaluate five distinct programs:

- Two digital literacy programs – Mobile Device Essentials and Web Design Essentials,
- Career Explorer - offered through VPL's Skilled Immigrant Information Centre,
- Storytime Early Language & Literacy Conference – for early childhood educators, and
- Babytime – held in three library branches.

The process tested different standardized questionnaires in Project Outcome and, similar to the pilot, deployed two patron surveys for each group of participants - a survey immediately following the program, and a follow-up survey several months later. In total, this process in 2019 encompassed 20 program sessions and reached 369 participants. Overall response rates were solid, at 70% and 17% for initial and follow-up surveys, respectively.

The Project Outcome implementation provided excellent outcomes-based results and learnings across the various programs. Results showed that following their participation in the Career Explorer program, 65% of respondents received an interview or offer for a new job, and 42% applied for a job they likely would not have applied for before. For the two digital literacy programs combined, we learned that 88% of respondents used what they learned to do something new or different. 100% of participants at the Storytime Early Language & Literacy Conference intended to apply what they learned, and for the in-branch Babytime programs, 95% of respondents felt more confident helping their children learn.

Overall, the implementation of Project Outcome provided VPL with important learnings about the applicability of the tool and its ability to meet the evaluation needs of different types of programs, adding to the broader learning on outcomes-based evaluation for the organization as a whole. VPL will continue to explore how best to maximize the benefit of using Project Outcome while also considering additional outcomes-based evaluation methods.

## SUMMARY

The initiatives presented in this report highlight VPL's commitment to continually evolving to meet Vancouverites' needs and expectations. This year's outcomes demonstrate the community's positive response to VPL's improved digital accessibility, expanded digital literacy offerings for children and enhanced partnerships with local Indigenous organizations. These are key deliverables that support our VPL Strategic Plan and the Provincial Strategic Plan.

### **Opportunities**

VPL has identified opportunities to expand our work in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Learning from our experiences, we will continue to bring Indigenous history, languages and cultures into library spaces. We also remain committed to being a place to learn about the history and cultures of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and will seek opportunities to enhance understanding and appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Actively engaging with Indigenous leaders and communities will be foundational to this work.

Another key opportunity is to continue to enhance our evaluation practices across all library services. We have grown our knowledge and practice of research, analysis and evaluation through our expanded roll out of the Project Outcome tool as well as through our work to develop an informed and evidence-based strategic plan. We will explore further opportunities to integrate outcomes-based evaluation methodologies and other evidence-based decision making into the planning, execution and measurement of our strategic and operational initiatives.

### **Challenges & Lessons Learned**

In the past year, leveraging technology and digital tools has been a major focus and we know that addressing the digital divide will remain an important area of VPL's work going forward. While it is important to remain up to date with the evolving landscape of digital resources to support our patrons, it is a challenge to maintain the skills and resources necessary to meet the diverse interests and needs of the community. To respond to these challenges, we need to continue to prioritize these investments and acknowledge the trade-offs required.

Partnerships remain the bedrock of many of our programs. While focusing on deepening our relationships with many partners through a number of projects this year, we learned that bringing together a diverse range of organizations is not without its challenges. Each partner brings unique knowledge and expertise as well as specific goals and interests to the partnership. These dynamics can be particularly challenging when working with multiple partners to develop and implement a single program, such as with Connection to Kith and Kin



and the Let's Talk about Reconciliation series. To support the strengthening of partnerships moving forward, VPL will continue to ensure that each organization has a voice in creation, development, and evaluation of projects and feels empowered to contribute in a meaningful way.