Introduction

About Us:

Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) opened its doors in 1936 as the Vancouver Island Union Library; it was the second regional library system in North America.

VIRL is now the fifth largest library system in British Columbia, and serves over 420,000 people on Vancouver Island, Haida Gwaii, and the Central Coast (Bella Coola) through 39 branch libraries, our eLibrary, and a Books-by-Mail service. Administrative offices are located in Nanaimo.
Our branches are key gathering places in our communities. Since 2011, VIRL has opened 13 renovated or refurbished branches to serve our customers’ needs. These branches serve our largest community (Nanaimo) and some of our smallest (Port Renfrew, Cortes Island), with more construction projects in the pipeline. 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 well for many years to come.

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

- Service area size: 42,900 square kilometers
- Population served: 427,236 in 2018
- Membership demographics:
  - 11% Children
  - 5% Teens
  - 84% Adults
- Collection (physical materials) size: 733,014
- Total visitors: 2.9 million in 2018
- Total circulation (no. of items checked out): 4.9 million in 2018

For more information, please see VIRL’s 2018 infographic sheet found [here](#).

**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 silver bullet 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, and that our spaces remain lifelines to information, vital resources for families and newcomers, spaces that nurture new 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 adjustments. Our workforce spans the full spectrum of age ranges and includes Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials. Each generation collectively maintains different values, attitudes, behaviours, and approaches to decision making. Additionally, we are experiencing a rise in retirements from long-serving staff members.

To succeed as an organization, VIRL recognizes that it needs to support its staff (and ultimately the library customers) by respecting the multiple perspectives our employees represent. To do this, we must continually promote positive employer/union relations and improve our methods of communication, decision making, and project management to create an effective and productive workplace culture.

**VIRL’s Strategic Plan**

VIRL is in the fourth 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
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.

**Outcome Measures**

A key component of the Strategic Plan is the development of Outcome Measures to evaluate the impact our programming and services provide our community members. VIRL is working with the measures developed by Project Outcome, modified for our diverse region.

In 2018, we used Outcome Measures to help inform the success and impact of the following initiatives:

- **Tech Tuesdays in Campbell River**
- **STEAM Program in a Box**

**Tech Tuesdays in Campbell River**

The outcomes from Tech Tuesdays held at the Campbell River branch indicate that 100% of participants feel more knowledgeable about using digital resources, more confident when using digital resources, and are more aware of the resources and services provided by the library. What attendees liked most about the program was having a person to guide them through the use of technology and answer their questions.

**STEAM Program in a Box – Staff outcomes**

In 2018 staff were asked to provide feedback on their experience with the newly introduced STEAM Program in a Box. The majority of staff who used the program in a box found they were more knowledgeable and confident about STEAM programming, and intended to apply what they learned about STEAM to other programs they offer.

**Output Measures**

VIRL continued to see strong Outputs from our programming and initiatives in 2018 (video available [here](#)). Thanks to innovative programming and a commitment to our customers’ evolving needs, we brought library services to residents of Vancouver Island in new and exciting ways, such as:

- STEAM Roadshow
- I Love My Library Month (LGBTQ2+ community members)
- Indigenous Voices Program
- Reconciliation Canada Speaker Series
- GeekCon
- Give Library Holiday Membership Drive
STEAM Roadshow

In the summer of 2018 VIRL embarked on a roadshow to celebrate and promote STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) in some of our most rural and remote communities. 3,347 kilometres later, more than 1,000 people had been engaged and 500 Virtual Reality experiences delivered in Sointula, Gold River, Port McNeill, Sayward, Quadra Island, and South Cowichan. A video showcasing the entire summer is available [here](#).

I Love My Library Month

October is Library Month at VIRL. To celebrate, VIRL showed its love for our LGBTQ2+ community by offering exciting programming such as Drag Queen Storytimes, new LGBTQ2+ reading lists for readers of every age, and a Safe Space sticker campaign designed to encourage welcoming and inclusive spaces throughout our communities. From social media to event turnout, Library Month engaged thousands of Vancouver Islanders and invited everyone to “Be Yourself Here”. A video highlighting the campaign is available [here](#).
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.

Reconciliation Canada Speaker Series

What is reconciliation? What is not reconciliation? These and other important issues were the topic of discussion with Reconciliation Canada Ambassador and member of the Snuneymux’w First Nation, Yvonne Rigsby-Jones. Nearly 200 people out for the first event in Cowichan, with subsequent sessions Nanaimo and the Comox Valley.
GeekCon

Every year, GeekCon — an annual celebration in Nanaimo, put on by the library, of all things geek — gets bigger, better, and geekier. In 2018, 2,200 attendees at the Nanaimo Harbourfront branch got their geek on at GeekCon with gaming tournaments, board games, retro gaming, sword fights, and film screenings. This hugely popular Nanaimo event is only poised to grow. Clearly, geeking out is in!

Give Library

This annual holiday-themed membership drive returned in 2018. After all, what could be better than a gift that educates, informs, and entertains, all for free? More than 2,000 cards were distributed to prospective library users across our system, including a group of housing-displaced community members in Nanaimo.
Discussion and Examples

Fostering Connected Communities: Advancing access to information and resources

Bridging the physical and digital worlds and connecting people with each other is a strategic priority for VIRL. This priority is highlighted in strategic principle two (Collect. Connect. Collaborate. Create.) within VIRL’s 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan, “Your Voice, Your Library”. The principle includes the following goals:

Library goal #1: Develop 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 #2: Spark imagination and collaboration by providing access to new technology and opportunities to create content.

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

How we did it:

The library of the 21st century is a mix of the traditional physical space and of the digital, “always-on” world. Excellence in programming and collections (both print and digital) empowers our communities by providing services and resources that contribute to a more knowledgeable and connected society.

STEAM Roadshow

The STEAM Roadshow is a mobile library that promotes and celebrates the latest technologies and digital resources. In 2018, the Roadshow stopped in some of our service area’s farthest corners where access to technology can be a challenge.

Partnerships:

- Sointula Salmon Days
- Port McNeill OrcaFest
- Gold River Days
- Sayward Summer Market
- Quadra Island Fall Fair

The goals of this initiative were to:

- **Increase access to and awareness of library services** by bringing the library outside our physical walls to new and unexpected places.
- **Promote innovative library services and programs** such as virtual reality and our eLibrary.
- **Spark interest and passion in digital resources and technologies** in some of our most rural and remote communities.
- **Promote and increase awareness** of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) learning across our service area.
Building Capacity:
Enabling inspiration and innovation

Inspiring creativity, innovation, and knowledge creation are key cornerstones of VIRL’s strategic plan. Principle four of the plan, “Life at Work”, recognizes that VIRL needs to support staff (and ultimately library customers) by celebrating multiple perspectives and generational spectrums.

**Library goal #1:** Initiate a succession plan at all levels which includes recognizing and developing the skills and knowledge held by our existing staff, as well as recruiting and retaining the best new talent.

**Library goal #2:** Develop and maintain robust staff training plans which incorporate staff input, annual reviews and the opportunity for customization at individual and regional levels to ensure our staff are empowered to deliver exceptional customer service.

**Library goal #3:** Strengthen internal communication so that all members of the organization are working collaboratively towards a common goal.

**How we did it:**

**Diversifying our Leadership**

In 2018, VIRL streamlined our Leadership team with responsive new positions to help steer our organization forward. Public services are the core of everything we do, and we recruited outside expertise for our Director of Library Services and Planning, and the newly created position of Deputy CAO and Chief Operating Officer.

We also created a new Growth and Development Specialist position, which we recruited from within our organization, to develop and deliver internal training and staff development initiatives.

As we do every year, VIRL also sent staff to a range of professional development opportunities, including BCLA, ALA, and the ALA Marketing Conference.

*The goals of this initiative were to:*

- **Provide staff with access** to professional development opportunities to further their development.
• **Ensure staff** had the training to thrive in their roles.
• **Ensure our organization** has the requisite leadership to position us for success.

**Working together:**  
**Creating lasting and sustainable partnerships**

Developing and maintaining strong relationships is fundamental to moving libraries’ shared strategies forward. VIRL listens to its diverse populations to create partnerships that allow us to understand the excitement in our cities and towns. 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 Aboriginal communities to address their unique needs.

**How we did it:**

**Indigenous Voices Program**

In 2018, VIRL held 57 events, including four Reconciliation Canada Speaker events.

More than 1,300 participants attended Indigenous Voices programs from Sooke to Masset. The highest attendance of a branch event was 89 in Cowichan for a program with students ranging in age from 6 to 16. They sang songs, played a traditional stick game and learned about local Indigenous culture.

Events have taken place in 20 branches, with 20 Elders including, Yvonne Rigsby-Jones, the Reconciliation Canada Ambassador.

There was a wide variety of programs produced on subjects such as:

• Reconciliation  
• Cedar weaving  
• Rattle and drum making  
• Miniature button blankets  
• Singing  
• Medicinal plants walk  
• First Nations history  
• Residential School experiences
• First Nations and Métis traditional stories such as the Seven Grandfathers
• Smudging and making smudge bundles
• Energy therapy

Programs more specific to children included storytelling, singing, drumming, and craft making.

The Reconciliation Canada series, titled What Reconciliation is and What it is Not, was held in Cowichan, Nanaimo and the Comox Valley. At the Cowichan event, approximately 185 people attended this powerful discussion — including preschoolers, young students, seniors, families and local politicians — with Yvonne Rigsby-Jones, member of the Snuneymux’w First Nation.

In 2019 we will be expanding Indigenous Voices 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.

**Partnerships:**

• Reconciliation Canada
• Cowichan Tribes
• Snuneymux’w First Nation
• K’omoks First Nation
• Mid Island Metis Nation
• Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre
• Vancouver Island Exhibition
• Elders representing various First Nations throughout our region

*The goals of this initiative were to:*

• **Build relationships and strengthen community connections**, creating lasting and sustainable partnerships.
• **Create a safe and respectful space** for all library users.
• **Engage in a respectful and ongoing dialogue** about reconciliation.

**Sustaining our success:**

**Enhancing governance and demonstrating impact**

VIRL’s Strategic Plan identifies that effective impact measurement tools and outcomes are integral to ensuring accountability and our strategic direction as an organization. To this end, VIRL is committed to measurement frameworks that continually collect, analyze, and report on the initiatives we undertake. This ensures accountability and informed decision making while tracking to assessed community needs.

The following goals support VIRL’s commitment to evaluating, demonstrating and communicating the value and importance of our services, collections, and resources to our stakeholders:
Library goal #1: Initiate better performance and outcome measures to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all our customers.

Library goal #3: Engage with customers to ensure that our facilities and library services reflect the needs of each of our distinct communities.

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:

Branch Fact Sheets

In 2014, VIRL developed a common measurement framework to report to both internal and external audiences. The Branch Fact Sheet provides a branch-by-branch comparative method of communicating branch-specific metrics. These quantitative metrics, which are produced each year in the form of an attractive infographic for Board Trustees, helps ensure that VIRL tracks to key performance indicators as a system. This allows management to address areas of declining service or population changes, and adjust library service offerings respectively. It also provides a visual tool for the public and political advocates to quickly assess and understand their library’s value in their communities. The “value of your card” measurement, for example, demonstrates the library’s immediate value per customer for that community.

The goals of this initiative are to:
- Provide a branch-by-branch comparison of metrics.
- Display data in an attractive infographic for external audiences.
- Demonstrate the success and use of each branch to our communities.
- Provide the Board with important information to inform decision making and advocacy efforts.

Key Performance Indicators and Branch Activity Reports

VIRL also collects consistent and regular Key Performance Indicators by branch. These monthly results are communicated to VIRL’s Board of Trustees and unions, and provide management with the information to prioritize system-wide initiatives and campaigns to address areas in need of improvement.

From a qualitative perspective, VIRL has also developed standardized Branch Activity Reports. These reports are filled out by library staff and do the work to communicate the stories and impactful interactions that add value to our communities.

Lastly, the Library Board of Trustees is provided with a regular synopsis of highlights from the Branch Activity Reports and Key Performance Indicators to help inform the important advocacy role they all play on behalf of the library.
The goals of this initiative are to:

- **Provide the Board** with detailed, branch-by-branch information to inform decision making.
- **Provide management with the information** to prioritize system-wide initiatives and campaigns to address areas in need of improvement.
- **Help inform the important advocacy** role they all play on behalf of the library.

**Borrower/Circulation Statistics**

Along with the annual Branch Fact Sheets and monthly Key Performance Indicators and Branch Activity Reports, VIRL produces monthly, comprehensive borrower and circulation statistics for management consideration and information. This information includes an analysis of circulation metrics — both physical and digital — which inform purchasing and strategic collections development.

The goals of this initiative are to:

- **Provide staff with data** to support efficient shipping and receiving collection management.
- **Budget effectively** for resources renewal.
- **Develop appropriate** staffing models.
- **Assist in the decision making** regarding building design and renovations.

**Outcome Measures**

A key component of the Strategic Plan is the development of Outcome Measures to evaluate the impact our programming and services provide our community members. VIRL is working with the measures developed by Project Outcome, modified for our diverse region.

In 2018, we used Outcome Measures to help inform the success and impact of the following initiatives:

- Tech Tuesdays in Campbell River
- STEAM Program in a Box

These Outcome Measures are discussed in detail in the first section of this report.

The goals of this initiative are to:

- **Better understand the impact** our programming has in our communities.
- **Provide clear reports** to the Board with direct community input to assist in advocacy efforts.
- **Develop a clear picture** of areas to celebrate and develop within our programming.

**Public Consultations**

In 2018, VIRL staff held four public consultation sessions in the communities of Woss, Chemainus, Sayward, and Sooke. Each of these communities is set to receive a renovated or refurbished branch in the near future. The sessions were extremely well attended and provided members of
the public with a platform to have their questions answered, and to provide input into the decision-making process for their new branches.

*The goals of this initiative are to:*

- **Engage with customers** to ensure that our facilities and library services reflect the needs of each of our distinct communities.
- **Ensure that our facilities process** is open, transparent, and incorporates community feedback.

**From the Board Table**

The Board of Trustees guides and supports the operation of all public library services in VIRL’s service area. In addition to governance, advocacy, and lobbying responsibilities, the Board is also accountable to policies and budgets which have a direct impact on the branches and communities VIRL serves.

To promote transparency, communication, and further accountability, VIRL produces a regular newsletter that presents the results of every Board meeting. *From the Board Table* is an easy to read and visually stimulating digital document designed to support the full minutes and agendas available at virl.bc.ca.

*The goals of this initiative are to:*

- **Engage with customers** to promote the role, vision, and decisions of the Board of Trustees.
- **Ensure that our Board of Trustees** is open, transparent, and is promoting the needs and interests of the communities they represent.
Summary

Without these funds VIRL would be unable to provide these unique resources, programs and services to our diverse customers – in both rural and urban environments.

- Black History Month
- Earth Day
- Library Month
- Therapy Dogs
- Tech Help
- Remembrance Day
- LitKits
- CELA/NNELS
- Family Literacy Week
- Score with Reading
- Self-Publishing
- Author Visits
- Writing Workshops
- Health and Wellness programming
- Homebound Deliveries
- Philosophers’ Café
- Support Groups
- ESL and language learning
- Book a Librarian
- Freedom to Read Week
- VR Experiences
- Spring Break programming
- Summer Reading Clubs and Challenges
- Seniors’ Outreach
- Parent-Child Mother Goose

Valued library partners, such as the BC Libraries Cooperative, provide VIRL with the ability to achieve economies of scale in purchasing database products and services. This provides library users in even some of our most remote communities with a full suite of items and information resources. Provincial grant funding contributes to our ability to provide these services to rural areas.

Champion of Literacy and lifelong learning:

Library-based literacy programs are a vital part of our Mission and essential to developing lifelong readers in our communities. In 2018, VIRL branches offered a wide variety of literacy programming including digital literacy (the ability to use technologies like computers, the Internet, and eReaders); adult basic literacy skills; health literacy; and financial literacy. We also know how important early literacy programming is to ensure children become successful readers for a lifetime. Here are just a few programs that we offered in 2018 to promote lifelong learning and literacy:
**Family Literacy Day** is a special event that takes place across the nation to celebrate adults and children reading and learning together and to encourage Canadians to spend at least 15 minutes enjoying learning together as a family every day. In 2018, branches featured special storytimes, video game making, breakout challenges, puppet shows, crafts, and more. Throughout the week, parents took home information on how to incorporate fun literacy activities into their daily lives.

**Reading Readiness Programs (0-6 yrs.):** In 2018, VIRL offered an array of programs as part of our core services for preschool children such as Babytime, Toddlertime and Family Storytime.

**Summer Reading Club:** In 2018, VIRL participated in the province-wide Summer Reading Club (SRC) with the assistance of Libraries Branch and the Ministry of Education. At VIRL, the club is for both independent readers and children who don't yet read on their own. VIRL purchases BC Library Association produced materials including posters, reading records, bookmarks, and theme related incentives. RBC (Royal Bank) provides reading medals for children that complete their reading records throughout the program. VIRL purchases additional materials to create a registration package for each SRC participant.

VIRL staff visited 388 school classrooms reaching over 9,000 children to promote the summer reading club. VIRL had 6,032 children participate in the program in 2018. VIRL branches provided 468 in-branch programs of which over 20,000 children attended. Clearly the SRC 2018 theme, along with imaginative programs and activities offered by VIRL greatly appealed to children.

**Bookfest** (Vancouver Island Children's Book Festival) is an annual event that celebrates excellence in Canadian children's literature and book illustration by showcasing both well-established and new authors and illustrators. Bookfest combines a day-long festival with school and public library readings. Authors and illustrators do readings at library branches throughout VIRL. The one-day event takes place in Nanaimo annually on the first Saturday of May.

**Here are just some of the community partners VIRL worked with during 2018:**

- Red Cross
- Community Health and Wellness Collaborative (Gabriola)
- Pride Society of the Comox Valley
- City of Nanaimo
- Skidegate Haida Immersion Program
- Nanaimo Correctional Centre
- Nanaimo Arts Council
- VIU Writing Department
- Literacy Central Vancouver Island
- John Howard Society
- Various Strong Starts
- Nanaimo Regional District
- Courtenay Adult Learning Centre
- School Districts
- Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Centre
- Federation of BC Writers
- Cowichan Valley Regional District
- Alzheimer Society of BC
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Cowichan Green Community
For many years, VIRL has provided library services to 38 communities. Many of these are remote, or island communities with limited access to other services, educational opportunities or computers and the Internet. VIRL also has longstanding books by mail service for remote and rural families. As well, VIRL participates in the province’s OneCard initiative, allowing VIRL cardholders to receive a OneCard to access library resources from any participating library in the province.

VIRL plays an important role in our entire service area, including rural, remote and Indigenous communities, by ensuring equitable access to VIRL’s diverse collection, library services and programs. For both our rural and urban communities, we offer an essential service to residents (access to collections, information technology, services and professional staff). By distributing our resources and services across our wide service area, we are able to enhance quality of life in our smaller communities that often lack access to other opportunities.

VIRL will continue to work with our communities and invest in rural library services such as community focused programs, enhancing access to VIRL services and providing additional technology training to rural and remote community residents.
2018 Support Videos

2018 Highlights Reel (a look at what kinds of programs VIRL offered in 2018)

Be Yourself Here (LGBTQ2+)

STEAM Roadshow