

MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: February 22, 2024
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Meeting Date: February 28, 2024

TO: Library Board
FROM: Tim Bottomer, Chair, SFHR Committee
SUBJECT: BC Provincial Library Grant Report

SUMMARY

This report provides VPL's submission to the Provincial Libraries Branch of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs related to services delivered in 2023 that are supported by provincial funding. This report uses a mandatory provincial template.

PURPOSE

This report is for decision.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the 2023 Provincial Library Grant Report.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Committee members recommended approval of the report, after asking clarifying questions.

BACKGROUND

To ensure public accountability and financial transparency, public libraries receiving provincial grant funding must submit three reports as part of the public library accountability framework:

- Annual survey of B.C.'s public libraries (statistics)
- Statement of Financial Information (SOFI)
- Provincial public library grant report (PLGR)

The PLGR provides an opportunity for libraries to showcase their achievements throughout the year and demonstrate how they support provincial programs and priorities.

The 2023 template has been revised from prior years to focus more on highlighting the impact of various provincial grants. The template format can be summarized as:

Introduction: Divided into two parts, the first segment allows libraries to provide information about both the library and its communities. The second part offers an opportunity to summarize the year's activities in an executive summary style.

Featured Initiatives: This section is tailored for libraries to elaborate on notable initiatives undertaken in 2023. Special emphasis should be placed on initiatives facilitated by the COVID-19 Relief & Recovery (CRR), Emergency Planning & Preparedness (EPP), or Enhancement Grants.

Challenges: This section has been modified to include a few new challenges, a scale/rating, and a section for libraries to describe their response to each response (as applicable).

DISCUSSION

VPL's 2023 Provincial public library grant report is attached for information. It will be submitted to the Province to meet the March 1st deadline following approval from the VPL Board.

2023 PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT (PLGR)

LIBRARY NAME:

Vancouver Public Library

CHECKLIST

For the PLGR to be considered complete, please ensure you have provided information for each of the following sections. Text boxes will expand as you type. Click on a title in the list below to jump to that section of the document.

- [1. INTRODUCTION](#)
- [2. FEATURED INITIATIVES](#)
- [3. CHALLENGES](#)
- [4. BOARD APPROVAL](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

Library and Community Profile – provide a brief description of your library and the community it serves (e.g., demographics, local economy, governmental relations, historical context, current issues, etc.).

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 662,248 through the Central library and 20 branches across the city.

Vancouver is known for its ethnically and linguistically diverse neighbourhoods and is the home of a significant Indigenous population. For 44% of residents, their mother tongue is a language other than English. It is also a city with an increasing aging population, with the number of seniors growing at twice the rate of growth in the overall population. Vancouver is also the most densely populated city in Canada. Population density, and the resulting decrease in private residential space, adds significant pressure to the demand for indoor public space provided by VPL.

The City faces several critical and immediate challenges including housing affordability, the climate emergency, economic pressures, neighborhood safety and belonging, and the overdose crisis. Housing affordability is one of Vancouver’s biggest challenges with many renters paying more than 30% of their income on rent and home ownership out of reach for those who do not already own property. 40% of the city’s jobs are held by workers who commute from the suburbs due in part to high housing costs. There are also more than 2,000 people who experience homelessness in the city and around 7,000 more who are on the precarious edge of homelessness. Changes in climate impact residents, businesses, buildings and infrastructure, requiring new municipal responses. Safety is a top of mind concern for many Vancouverites, with hate crime incidents almost doubling from 2019 to

2020, further affecting communities who are racialized and experience a disproportionate impact of violence. Finally, people in Vancouver continue to be severely impacted by the mix of long-standing mental health and public health crises.

These societal challenges have made post pandemic recovery more complex for VPL as staff deal with increased numbers of security incidents. On a positive note, in 2023, VPL saw continuing recovery of library usage, recording over 4.5 million in-person visits. Patrons borrowed over 10 million digital and physical items and received answers to nearly 450,000 reference questions. By continuing to offer virtual programs and increasing investment in-person programs, VPL was able to record total program participation of over 181,000.

Our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan is based on wide-ranging feedback where we heard that VPL must continue to find ways to meet the needs of seniors, newcomers, children, youth, low-income and Indigenous peoples in Vancouver. Our Board identified four strategic priorities grounded in VPL's mission, vision and values: Learning & Creativity; Shared Spaces & Experiences; Belonging & Connection; and Organizational Strength.

2023 Year in Review – Highlight activities and accomplishments that the library has focused on this year. Briefly outline how library funding (local, provincial, annual, one-time/targeted) has been used or earmarked for library services and/or special initiatives to meet community needs.

In 2023, both annual municipal and provincial funding as well as one-time grants enabled VPL to address a number of challenges facing both our patrons and our staff, while also advancing our strategic priorities.

Climate change is increasingly impacting our daily lives, and VPL provides critical refuge during extreme weather. Our spaces are sought out when people need to escape heat waves and wildfire particulate, or when we have extreme cold. To ensure that all of our spaces are ready for these extreme events, we installed an additional air conditioning unit at Carnegie branch and added water fountains / bottle fillers at all branches that did not yet have these, giving access to drinking water for the patrons at Firehall, Fraserview, Kensington, Champlain and Dunbar branches, where it was previously provided via single use water bottles during heat emergencies. We also replaced our home delivery van with an electric vehicle to reduce the carbon footprint for Accessible Services' delivery services.

VPL places a high priority on making our branches accessible and welcoming for everyone. In 2023, VPL added an array of accessible devices, hardware, software, and furniture, including height adjustable tables, to all locations. A streamlined card system was implemented for patrons with disabilities, which includes access to Home Delivery, specialty formats, and assistive technology. An expanded 8-week lending limit for these patrons helps those who may need additional time to finish reading or listening to a book. This small change created a more flexible card system that works for a wider array of patrons with neurological and physical disabilities. The new system also allows patrons to place holds on specialty material through the general holds system, and allows patrons with disabilities more independence and autonomy in using the library.

Patron access to these services and collections was further enhanced by relocating the accessible services unit from a hard to find location to a more visible space within Central Library. An additional benefit was the increased awareness of services for patrons with disabilities among staff.

In June, the West Point Grey branch relocated to a brighter, more accessible location one block west. The new location features high contrast signage, window seating, a dedicated program/meeting room and an accessible height-adjustable public computer desk. Patrons have expressed how much they appreciate the changes, particularly the fresh look and atmosphere.

The relocation of the West Point Grey branch also provided an opportunity to celebrate the Musqueam land that the branch is located on by collaborating with the Musqueam Nation to develop a welcome sign in English and hə́nq̓əmiḥə́m in the front entry.

In 2023, VPL showcased Indigenous voices, including Jody Wilson-Raybould, Brian Trottier, Michelle Good, Angela Sterritt and Darrel McLeod. Other initiatives included the Truth and Reconciliation Book Club and development of two new courses: "Indigenous Considerations for Newcomers to Canada" and "Toward Reconciliation: Start Your Learning Journey." These efforts help to bridge knowledge gaps and provide basic education, fostering understanding and dialogue within the community.

A fundamental priority for VPL is to offer free access to support lifelong learning, with continued emphasis on early literacy and bringing the digital divide. Toward this, in 2023 VPL's Children and Teen Services provided STEM Kits for use in four branches to provide access to low-barrier STEM programming and resources that meet the educational and recreational needs of children and families. This trial utilized accessible and flexible hardware such as SNAP Circuits and Ozobots to support children engaging in technology-based creativity and discovery. Based on learning from this, VPL intends to make STEM kits available at all branches.

In support of organizational strength, VPL made significant progress on a strategic initiative to advance equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace. In 2023, VPL undertook an organizational assessment that engaged staff to better understand employee experiences and the impacts of systemic inequities on specific groups of staff. The assessment's findings and recommendations lay the foundations for the development of a 3-year EDI Action Plan.

2. FEATURED INITIATIVES

Please describe any significant initiatives the library has undertaken in the past year, focusing particularly on use of the 2022 COVID-19 Relief & Recovery (CRR) and Emergency Planning & Preparedness (EPP) Grants, and plans to use the 2023 Enhancement Grant. To report on multiple initiatives, "copy" the blank table below and insert additional tables as needed using the "paste" function. Use one table per initiative.

Initiative Title	
Addressing Urgent Community Needs	
What is the nature of this initiative? (both may apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> New targeted initiatives	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporting/enhancing existing operations
Area of Operations (select as many as apply)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Basic operations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Salaries & benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Lease & utilities	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology <input type="checkbox"/> In-house patron software/hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Loanable hardware

<input type="checkbox"/> Collections	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff software/hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Connectivity
<input type="checkbox"/> Facility upgrades	<input type="checkbox"/> Library programming
<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic planning and governance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff development
<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency preparedness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community outreach
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): In-branch security	
Social Impact (select as many as apply)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accessibility and inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental sustainability, climate action
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mental health and wellness	<input type="checkbox"/> Reconciliation and Indigenous relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
What is the status of this initiative?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Planning/research stage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Implementation in progress
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete	<input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing as part of operations
Is this a multi-year initiative?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Summary – Provide a brief description of the activities undertaken this year. Please include details such as any partnerships or resources leveraged to accomplish this initiative.	
<p>VPL seeks to address urgent community needs through a two pronged strategy – providing support for staff, and also referring patrons to social services that they need. VPL identified these as priority areas for investment of the Provincial grant in the 2023-26 period. In 2023, staff undertook planning and consultation to ensure the approach would best address needs that vary by neighbourhood, and began implementation.</p> <p>The existing Community Librarian team began delivery of additional services in late 2023. This included a partnership with settlement agencies in an underserved area of Vancouver, increasing access for refugee families who struggle to navigate available services. Through 2024-26, Provincial funding allocated to backfill public service in branches will help to free up Community Librarians to conduct more outreach, rebuilding relationships after COVID and providing service outside the library.</p> <p>In 2024, VPL will add a full time limited term Community Access Worker to serve the North East area, with a focus on the Downtown Eastside. They will support initiatives such as coffee programs and local service provider pop-up events to help connect patrons with appropriate community services and supports. This pilot program will be possible because of Provincial funding, however, it will be a limited term as continuing funds are not available.</p> <p>VPL added another security staff member at the náćá?mat ct Strathcona branch in August 2023. This complements our supportive roles by setting clear behaviour expectations in a high-incident location, to ensure the safety and comfort of all patrons and staff. VPL security staff are trained to take a community-led approach that recognizes the impact of trauma and social conditions, while prioritizing safety for all.</p> <p>Recognizing the increasingly complex public environment for library staff, the City of Vancouver Council provided funding in 2023 for Health & Wellness Consultant who will support the organization and help staff develop skills in crisis prevention and intervention, harassment, mental health and related areas. By first hiring someone internally focused, one individual can help prepare staff system-wide to support as many patrons as possible. It is hoped that the combination of this permanent</p>	

position with the temporary roles funded through the Provincial Enhancement Grant will help VPL to address urgent community needs effectively.

Progress Report – If you have reported on this initiative in a previous year's PLGR, what has changed since then? What progress has been made, or what obstacles have you encountered?

Budgetary Information – please outline whether/how provincial funding (annual or one-time/targeted e.g., CRR, EPP, Enhancement Grants) contributes to the estimated cost of this initiative.

The Provincial Enhancement Grant supported additional security staff and the Community Librarian team's enhanced services in 2023. In 2024, funds from this grant will be applied to the full-time Community Access Worker role as well as information staff backfill to free up community librarians from in branch work and enable them to conduct more outreach.

Rationale – Why was this initiative prioritized? (e.g. fulfilling commitments under strategic plan, responding to emergent community need, availability of funding, etc.)

Neighbourhoods across Vancouver are struggling with overlapping crises. This is particularly affecting our downtown and adjacent locations, where people struggling with mental health and affordability challenges have become dependent on the library as public space. Central Library, nécâ?mat ct Strathcona and Carnegie branches see one third of VPL visits, and three quarters of security incidents. VPL staff are on the front line, dealing with the impacts of these issues, which are expressed both verbally and physically to our staff, security teams, and other library patrons. Between 2019 - 2022, physical and verbal assaults increased 60% in our libraries.

The combination of increased security and community access workers is intended to provide support for both staff, who need tools and support to deal with challenging situations, and patrons who need to be connected with social services.

What impacts does/will this initiative have on the library and/or the community? Please include any applicable metrics or quantitative data to demonstrate impact.

The addition of security staff is intended to reduce the number and severity of security incidents at nécâ?mat ct Strathcona branch. Providing greater levels of outreach service, both through the new Community Access Worker role as well as enabling Community Librarians to spend more time in the community, will help to connect patrons with a network of social services.

VPL will continue to track security incidents to evaluate the impact of these measures.

Initiative Title	
Core Training for VPL Staff	
What is the nature of this initiative? (both may apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> New targeted initiatives	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporting/enhancing existing operations
Area of Operations (select as many as apply)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Basic operations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Salaries & benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Lease & utilities <input type="checkbox"/> Collections	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology <input type="checkbox"/> In-house patron software/hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Loanable hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Staff software/hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Connectivity
<input type="checkbox"/> Facility upgrades	<input type="checkbox"/> Library programming
<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic planning and governance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff development
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emergency preparedness	<input type="checkbox"/> Community outreach
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
Social Impact (select as many as apply)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accessibility and inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental sustainability, climate action
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mental health and wellness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reconciliation and Indigenous relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
What is the status of this initiative?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Planning/research stage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Implementation in progress
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete	<input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing as part of operations
Is this a multi-year initiative?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Summary – Provide a brief description of the activities undertaken this year. Please include details such as any partnerships or resources leveraged to accomplish this initiative.	
<p>During the pandemic, core training for VPL staff was paused, creating a backlog. In 2023, training was prioritized for new and existing staff to address this. The volume of training that needed to be updated and delivered and the associated backfill of staff in public service roles required to ensure all library locations remained open would not have been possible without the additional support from Provincial grants. Core training at VPL includes: Awareness of Mental Health in the Workplace, Building Respectful and Inclusive Workplaces, Managing Conflict, Patron-Centred Service, Workplace Violence Prevention, and Impacts of Residential Schools and Colonization. In addition, staff in supervisory roles are required to take Gender Diversity Foundational Training.</p> <p>These courses are essential for roles at VPL and equip employees with the knowledge and skills to succeed in their jobs. Post pandemic, many courses were updated with refreshed content, and others such as Workplace Violence Prevention, were entirely new. This meant that the majority of staff</p>	

attending training were taking these courses for the first time. By accelerating training delivery in 2023, more staff were able to reap the benefits each course provides to their role at VPL.

In 2023, a total of 1,291 staff enrollments took place across the core training courses, a significant number for VPL's 800 staff.

In 2024, VPL intends to continue prioritizing training for those who have not yet taken the updated curriculum for each core course, and allocating Provincial grant funds for this purpose. Additionally, for staff with supervisory responsibilities, Crucial Conversations training will be delivered to enable leadership to address challenging or sensitive situations at early stages, with an informal approach. This program has received stellar reviews from participants.

Progress Report – If you have reported on this initiative in a previous year's PLGR, what has changed since then? What progress has been made, or what obstacles have you encountered?

Budgetary Information – please outline whether/how provincial funding (annual or one-time/targeted e.g., CRR, EPP, Enhancement Grants) contributes to the estimated cost of this initiative.

As a result of the Provincial Enhancement Grant, VPL was able to reduce a substantial backlog of training for VPL staff across all departments and branches. Staff were further supported through the addition of workplace violence prevention training funded by the Emergency Planning and Preparedness Grant. Provincial funding enabled VPL to ensure this training was a priority for all staff in 2023, contributing to the cost of the training programs as well as the necessary replacement staffing to maintain public service.

Rationale – Why was this initiative prioritized? (e.g. fulfilling commitments under strategic plan, responding to emergent community need, availability of funding, etc.)

VPL requires all new staff to participate in core training, with existing staff refreshing their participation every 5 years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff training was paused. As a result, VPL faced a backlog of staff requiring training in 2023.

Increasingly, staff are dealing with patrons who may be unhoused, experiencing food insecurity, and dealing with mental health issues and/or addiction. These circumstances lead to problematic behaviours in library public spaces that require skilled and sensitive responses from our staff. Every staff member working in our branches needs to be able to support public service, and requires training on de-escalating difficult situations. Similarly, staff require training and tools to strengthen their own personal resilience and to understand VPL's post-pandemic operating environment. In 2023, a number of training programs were added to the core list, and others were substantially updated. This underscored the urgent need to provide training to both new and existing staff, enabling VPL to fulfil its commitment to strategic goal 4.1 of ensuring VPL staff have the support and resources to adapted to a transformed work environment.

What impacts does/will this initiative have on the library and/or the community? Please include any applicable metrics or quantitative data to demonstrate impact.

By accelerating delivery of core training, more VPL staff will be equipped to consistently deliver the patron centred service that they are known and respected for. It will also ensure that staff have the skills and tools to more confidently address the challenges that come with work in a modern library setting.

Surveys of the public and staff are undertaken to assess satisfaction levels. VPL consistently has the highest level of public satisfaction among all City of Vancouver departments.

3. CHALLENGES

The following topics have been identified as recurrent themes in prior years' PLGRs, along with challenges that have surfaced throughout the current year. Use the 'Other' row at the bottom of the table to include any ongoing or past challenges that are not included in this list. If you have more than one 'Other' item to add, please "copy" the last row and use the "paste" function to insert additional rows as needed.

Please use the check boxes in the 'Rating' column to specify how severely your library has been impacted by each challenge in the past year. If a listed challenge does not affect your library, you may leave that row blank.

Use the 'Response' column to briefly describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it, referring to the Featured Initiatives section above where applicable. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are.

Challenge	Rating	Response
Financial pressure (e.g., rising costs, reduced revenues, forecasting uncertainty, local budget)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input type="checkbox"/> Least concern	VPL continues to be challenged by rising costs, increased public demands, and aging infrastructure.
Governance (e.g., changes on the library board, relationship/conversations with local government)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Least concern	

Emergency response (e.g., fires, floods, extreme weather)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input type="checkbox"/> Least concern	Both climate emergencies and the pandemic led VPL to prioritize development of business continuity and emergency response plans. A two year position was funded by the City of Vancouver to develop these plans for all departments and branches.
Staffing (e.g., recruitment and retention, mental health, and wellness)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input type="checkbox"/> Least concern	Staff turnover, a high proportion of auxiliary staff, and post COVID fragility have made recruitment and retention one of VPL’s greatest challenges. To address this, VPL has initiated additional training, worked to reduce precarious positions through consolidation of hours for part time staff, and embarked on a wellness program.
Connectivity (e.g., low bandwidth, lack of home internet in the community)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Least concern	
Infrastructure/facilities (e.g., aging/damaged, renovations, new builds/upgrades/expansions)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input type="checkbox"/> Least concern	
Community access to the library (e.g., geographic isolation, lack of local public transit, building accessibility)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Least concern	
Disappearing services in the community (e.g., government, banking, health)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Least concern	
Public health (e.g., COVID-19, vaccinations, access to Telehealth)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Least concern	
Regulatory impacts (e.g., accessibility, privacy, employment standards)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Least concern	VPL engaged the Rick Hansen Foundation in 2020 to undertake facility accessibility audits at 19 locations, with 18 receiving certification, and has implemented improvements in response to the findings.
Vulnerable communities (e.g., people experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health crisis)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input type="checkbox"/> Least concern	The increasing social issues facing Vancouver directly impacts VPL staff who are on the front lines. To address this,

		VPL has deployed more security staff, hired an internal facing social worker, and added training, as noted above.
Sociopolitical tensions (e.g. intellectual freedom, protests, global events, racism, homophobia)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input type="checkbox"/> Least concern	<p>Incidents of racism have increased dramatically in Vancouver, and the spectre of censorship and book banning is being felt across Canada as we observe this in the US.</p> <p>One of VPL's strategic priorities is to <i>Foster a connected community by providing opportunities for social interaction, sharing, and informed civic dialogue.</i> A number of new public programs have been developed to address this topic.</p>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> High concern <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern <input type="checkbox"/> Least concern	

4. BOARD APPROVAL

Electronic signatures are acceptable where physical signatures are not feasible.

Library Director Signature: _____

Date: _____

Board Chair Signature: _____

Date: _____