

MANAGEMENT REPORT

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Meeting Date: January 29, 2025

TO: Library Board

FROM: Carol Nelson, Director, Planning & Communications

SUBJECT: VPL Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy – 2022-2024 Actions

SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of activities that VPL has undertaken from 2022 to 2024 to address the goals outlined in the Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy. This strategy contributes to the implementation of the City of Vancouver’s response to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and responds to the calls of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada.

PURPOSE

This report is for information.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board receive this report for information.

POLICY

Following the City of Vancouver’s endorsement of the UNDRIP Strategy ([link to report](#)) on October 25, 2022, the VPL Board endorsed the VPL Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy on November 23, 2022. The VPL Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy ([link to report](#)) is intended to align with and support the UNDRIP implementation strategies at both the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia, while also continuing to address the Calls to Action of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada) and Calls to Justice of the Inquiry into MMIWG (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) and Red Women Rising Reports.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The VPL 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, developed prior to the City of Vancouver's adoption of UNDRIP, includes two specific goals related to Truth & Reconciliation: *Reflect and celebrate Indigenous cultures and history* (Shared Spaces & Experiences priority) and *Enhance understanding and appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing* (Belonging & Connection priority), in addition to seeking opportunities to act on the Calls to Action of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission across all goals. The Strategic Plan did not include specific reference to UNDRIP, however, VPL's endorsement of the UNDRIP Strategy and Action Plan aligns with prior strategic goals and has expanded the work of VPL related to Indigenous rights.

INDIGENOUS CONSIDERATIONS

The City of Vancouver's UNDRIP Strategy and [UNDRIP Action Plan 2024-2028](#) provide a robust analysis of Indigenous Considerations related to this work.

BACKGROUND

VPL's work to respond to the TRC Calls to Action began almost immediately upon release of the Calls to Action in June of 2015. From 2016 to 2020, staff presented reports to the Board summarizing activities that VPL had undertaken to respond to the Calls to Action. In July 2017, the Board endorsed a set of actions ([link to report](#)) recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA). This CFLA Committee included participation by both a VPL manager and Board member. The Board reports summarizing activities in 2018 ([link to report](#)), and in 2019-2020 ([link to report](#)), linked each of the activities undertaken to a recommendation of the CFLA committee.

In November 2019, the Province of BC passed legislation to implement UNDRIP, the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act \(DRIPA\)](#). In March 2021, Vancouver City Council established an [UNDRIP Task Force](#) composed of seven xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) representatives and five City Councillors, to provide advice to City Council on what the City should do to implement UNDRIP.

In February 2022, Chief Librarian & CEO Christina de Castell presented a report summarizing the Library's current, planned and potential activities that support the implementation of UNDRIP ([link to report](#)). She also noted that the Library had been invited to participate in processes for the UNDRIP Task Force. Subsequently, VPL's Indigenous Planner participated as a member of the task force technical committee, providing support to the UNDRIP Task Force as they developed the strategy and action plan. In addition to these efforts, VPL staff participated in the City of Vancouver processes to consider the Calls to Justice of the Inquiry into MMIWG (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) ([link to report](#)) and Red Women Rising Reports ([link to report](#)).

In October 2022, the City of Vancouver’s UNDRIP Strategy was endorsed by City Council. In November 2022, VPL’s Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy, developed in close alignment with the City’s UNDRIP Strategy, was endorsed by the Board. In June 2024, Chief Librarian & CEO de Castell presented the City of Vancouver’s UNDRIP Action Plan 2024-2028 to the Board, noting that VPL staff had participated in the development of the Action Plan with City of Vancouver staff and staff from the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. The Board adopted the City’s UNDRIP Action Plan and agreed to collaborate on co-implementation of the relevant actions as requested by Council.

DISCUSSION

VPL is taking action in many ways to address the goals in the Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy; three specific actions are part of the City’s UNDRIP Action Plan 2024-2028. These three actions are therefore directly guided by the UNDRIP Task Force Intergovernmental Table which comprises members from Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and the City of Vancouver. These three actions are as follows:

Action Group 2: Urban Indigenous Engagement

- The purpose of this initiative is to “... develop a coordinated urban Indigenous engagement process and protocols grounded in right relations with the local Nations and respect for the priorities of urban Indigenous community members” (COV UNDRIP Action Plan, p.8). To date, the action group has facilitated four community engagement sessions with urban Indigenous Peoples in Vancouver; three of the engagements were hosted in turn by the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. The fourth engagement reported back on the feedback received to the urban Indigenous Peoples attending and committed to following up on their recommendations. VPL’s Indigenous Planner attended each of these engagements, which are designed to have urban Indigenous community members discuss needs and opportunities with various departments and organizations across the City. Moving forward, three engagements will take place per year and VPL is exploring opportunities for public-facing library staff to participate in future engagements.

Action Group 9: Public Realm

- The purpose of this initiative is to “... ensure Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh priorities for cultural visibility shape the use, naming, design, cultural expression, and commemorative aspects of public realm...” (COV UNDRIP Action Plan, p. 17). VPL is working closely with the City’s Arts, Culture, and Community Services department and City Public Art staff to develop art calls in a way that complies with the protocols developed through this initiative. The Children’s Library is the first VPL art call that incorporates this new approach, which includes limiting the call to local Nations and inviting Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh artists (one from each Nation) to comprise our selection jury. We anticipate the artist selection for the Children’s Library

art call to take place in January 2025. As well, VPL has met with members of the Musqueam Language and Culture department to discuss gifting a name for the new branch at Oakridge. Members of the Musqueam Language and Culture department visited Central Library in December 2024 to learn more about the library's processes and further the naming discussion. It is anticipated that the new branch will open in 2025 with a hənq̓əmiṇəm name gifted by the Musqueam Indian Band.

Action Group 12: Institutional Representation

- VPL's main deliverable under this initiative is to “[d]evelop recommendations for changes to VPL governance and relevant legislation to ensure governance practices align with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh priorities for representation.” (COV UNDRIP Action Plan, p. 24). This corresponds to work on inclusive governance underway at VPL at the direction of the Board, which has received funding from the Province. As part of the City's UNDRIP Action Plan processes, VPL staff developed a project charter outlining the scope of work, deliverables and timelines for this initiative. They have also undertaken a comprehensive environmental scan to describe the landscape of consultation and inclusive governance with First Nations in BC as context for VPL's co-governance initiative. An initial planning discussion with the three host Nations is scheduled for January 17, 2025. Discussions on the Board's involvement will take place through the Governance Committee later in 2025.

VPL has organized the remaining activities undertaken from 2022 to 2024 under the four goal areas of VPL's Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy (which mirror the four major themes of the B.C. DRIPA Implementation Plan and City's UNDRIP Strategy):

1. Social, Cultural and Economic Well-being
2. Ending Indigenous-Specific Racism and Discrimination
3. Self-Determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government
4. Rights and Title of Indigenous Peoples

Goal 1. Support Social, Cultural, and Economic Wellbeing

Objectives (from VPL's Indigenous Rights & Reconciliation Strategy)

- Direct VPL capacity and resources to support Indigenous communities to reclaim, uphold, and continue Indigenous languages, traditions, knowledge systems and cultural heritages.
- Ensure VPL careers are inviting to Indigenous workers, and VPL contract opportunities are accessible to Indigenous businesses and professionals.

Actions Undertaken From 2022 to 2024

- **Special Collections.** In 2022, VPL’s Special Collections staff collaborated with the Musqueam Indian Band’s Archives team to identify images in VPL Archives related to Musqueam history. They co-developed new protocols for public access, ensuring appropriate permission from Musqueam Indian Band for image reuse.
- **Indigenous Film Collection.** In 2022, VPL launched a streaming video collection focused on Indigenous voices and perspectives. The Indigenous Film Collection includes an 85-title catalogue of First Nations Films, a local production company that has created award-winning documentary films for, by, and about Indigenous Peoples since 1998.
- **Reciprocity Gifts.** In 2023, VPL established an organization-wide practice of presenting reciprocity gifts to Indigenous speakers, presenters, and knowledge-keepers who provided programming or other services to VPL. A VPL staff committee identified an opportunity to create handmade cardholders (for library cards) as a meaningful interim gift, which were well received by recipients. Discussions are underway on additional VPL-branded gifts to be made available in the near future.
- **West Point Grey Branch.** In 2023, VPL worked with Musqueam Indian Band to include a welcome sign in hə́nq̓əmiḥə́m in the entry of the relocated West Point Grey branch. Musqueam language students recorded pronunciations to support staff education. VPL also commissioned Musqueam artist Darrell Blyth to design window graphics to celebrate the Musqueam land on which the branch resides.
- **Library Technician Internship Program.** In 2024, VPL began collaborating with Langara College-snə́weyət̓ lelə́m to develop an internship program for Indigenous graduates of Langara’s Library and Information Technology diploma program, prioritizing the intake of students from Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. The internship is intended to provide four months of full-time employment at VPL for two Indigenous graduates per year, after which interns would move into the auxiliary pool where they can apply for other VPL positions.
- **Partnerships.** In 2022, following agreement by the Board, VPL worked with City of Vancouver staff to provide office space on Level 8 of Central Library to the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS) through a grant approved by City Council. In addition to providing affordable office space, this has increased the opportunities for public programming partnerships with IRSSS. From 2022 to 2024, VPL organized 25 public programs with the IRSSS, including beading workshops, residential school survivor testimonies, and workshops outlining the history and impacts of residential schools, and in 2024, supported IRSSS to develop and launch their podcast, “Woven Spirit: Threads of Wisdom”.

- **Procurement.** The City of Vancouver procurement process now includes questions about vendor partnerships with First Nations businesses, how the vendor prioritizes Indigenous participation for economic outcomes, if the vendor is majority owned or controlled by Indigenous Peoples, and programs that advance EDI goals and career advancement for Indigenous Peoples. The responses are evaluated and scored by the City’s Sustainable & Ethical Procurement Manager which has enabled VPL to include an evaluation of these responses in the selection process, such as for the most recent security services contract.
- **Meeting Space.** In 2023, meeting space in Level 8 of the Central Library was made available free of charge for the use of Musqueam Indian Band, Squamish Nation, or Tsleil-Waututh Nation.
- **Smudging.** In 2024, VPL developed procedures to enable smudging to take place at several VPL locations. At the Central Library, in consultation with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS), VPL worked with the City of Vancouver to enable smudging to be safely done on the top floor balconies and garden space adjacent to meeting rooms. Over time, the goal is to have procedures in place for smudging at all VPL locations.

Goal 2. Address Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination

Objectives

- Work with Indigenous communities and partners to offer library services and programs in a manner that is culturally appropriate, accessible, and reflects the expressed needs and priorities of Indigenous Peoples.
- Ensure all VPL staff have a constructive and respectful understanding of the distinct histories and unique rights of Indigenous Peoples and contribute to public education and understanding of Indigenous rights and reconciliation.
- Provide a culturally safe environment both internally (among VPL staff and Trustees) and externally (for partners, patrons, and community) in which to address harms and support the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous communities, including residential school survivors, intergenerational survivors, and Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ communities.

Actions Undertaken from 2022 to 2024

- **Public Programming.** VPL continues to offer public programs that encourage understanding of Truth, Reconciliation and Indigenous rights and that celebrate Indigenous excellence. It also strives to deliver programming that meets the needs of Indigenous patrons, often in collaboration with Indigenous organizations. From 2022 to 2024, these programs combined have reached over 8,000 participants across multiple platforms and library venues. Major programs include:

- **Indigenous Storyteller in Residence.** Since 2009, VPL has annually hosted an Indigenous Storyteller in Residence in recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the importance of storytelling as a way to learn about and from Indigenous Peoples. In 2022, **Eden Fine Day** (nehiyaw iskwew / Cree woman) recorded original music, hosted cultural programs, conducted workshops and hosted school visits for a variety of age groups, sharing her passion and culture. In 2023, **Les George** (səlilwətał / Tsleil-Waututh Nation) hosted numerous programs including one in conversation with his brother Sam George Jr. where the two Elders and knowledge keepers from the səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nation shared teachings about Indian Residential Schools and emphasized that truth and learning must come before reconciliation. And in 2024, **Joseph Kakwinokanasum** (James Smith Cree Nation) hosted book clubs about his novel, offered one-to-one writing consults for emerging authors, and connected with community members at the Downtown Eastside Writers Festival.
- **National Day for Truth & Reconciliation.** Since 2021, VPL has organized and delivered programs in recognition of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. VPL staff have continued to evolve and deepen our commitment to support patrons in their learning on this critical topic and in 2024, a working group was created to deliver a coordinated and consistent approach to public promotion across branches and digital spaces. Each year, VPL presents film screenings, author talks, workshops and testimonials for adults, showcases book displays highlighting relevant materials for patrons, and offers virtual field trip programs for school age children, in partnership with the Indian Residential Schools Survivor Society (IRSSS). Carnegie and náčá?mat ct Strathcona Branches remained open to the public on September 30th, providing space for patrons in those communities to gather and access resources and services on this important day.
- **Indigenous History Month and Indigenous Peoples Day.** VPL annually offers a variety of programming for Indigenous History Month (June) and participates in events in celebration of National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21st. Programs for Indigenous History Month often feature author talks sharing stories about the intergenerational impacts of residential school and the Sixties Scoop. VPL also provides audience-appropriate educational resources including puppets and music to support Indigenous-focused Storytime, and teen resource and book lists.
- **Indigenous Considerations for Newcomers.** In 2022, VPL developed this program to address a knowledge gap identified by Library Champions (part of the New to BC program) and community members. It provides a newcomer-friendly introduction to Indigenous matters in Vancouver and covers topics such as land

acknowledgments, the three local Nations, Truth and Reconciliation, common terminology, Indigenous art and architecture. In 2024, this program was translated into Chinese and delivered in Cantonese at Terry Salman branch, garnering positive patron response and media attention, and is anticipated to be offered in Mandarin at West Point Grey Branch in 2025.

- **Towards Reconciliation: Start Your Learning Journey.** In 2023, to address broader interest from Vancouver residents in the Indigenous Considerations for Newcomers program, VPL developed an additional program which enables everyone to build a foundation of knowledge about Indigenous issues and supports people who are curious about land acknowledgements, Truth and Reconciliation, common terminology, and UNDRIP.
- **Programming to amplify Indigenous voices.** In addition to the major programs, other VPL programming features Indigenous authors, elders and public figures as an established part of VPL's annual calendar. 2024 programs featured Michelle Cyca, Alicia Elliott, Diane Morrisseau, and Katherine Vermette.
- **Storytime visits to Indigenous childcare facilities.** VPL has worked with local Indigenous childcare providers to provide regularly scheduled Storytime visits to Indigenous childcare facilities. From 2022 to 2024, VPL made 58 visits to four centres (Aboriginal Mother's Centre Society, Eagles nest, Singing Frog, and Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre) to deliver Storytime programs to 542 participants.
- **Connections to Kith and Kin** continues to offer three seasons of genealogy programming per year to Vancouver's Indigenous community. Each consists of eight weekly sessions available online or in-person at Britannia branch. The Indian Residential School Survivors Society's Resolution Health Support Worker provides cultural support and leadership to this program, while VPL and Library and Archives Canada staff support the participants' genealogical research. Since introducing the hybrid model, each season has reached maximum capacity for a total of 54 participants from 2022 to 2024.
- **Staff Training.** VPL continues to provide mandatory Indigenous cultural safety and sensitivity training to all staff, and supports staff in accessing additional training in areas such as creating a welcoming and inviting environment for Indigenous colleagues, patrons, partners and leaders. Some of the training offered in the past three years includes:
 - **Impacts of Residential Schools and Colonization** (previously Fire Across the Land) is mandatory training, to be refreshed every 5 years, for all staff except for

Indigenous staff. This presents the history of systemic oppression of Indigenous Peoples and explores key issues facing Indigenous Peoples today from a historical and critical perspective. From 2022 to 2024, 338 staff completed this training.

- **Cultural Competency: Indigenous and Urban Indigenous Peoples** was mandatory training for part-time and auxiliary staff; from 2022 to mid-2024, a total of 136 staff took this course. In 2024, City staff began work to re-design this course as an introduction to UNDRIP, working with the three local Nations. Timing for completion is not yet determined.
- **Staff Newsletter.** The VPL Truth and Reconciliation Working Group launched an all-staff email newsletter in September 2022. The bi-monthly communication included updates and resources related to upholding Indigenous rights and reconciliation at VPL. The newsletter was paused in November 2023 due to lack of staff capacity.
- **Women’s Memorial March.** Each year since 1992, the Women’s Memorial March takes place on February 14th in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside to remember and grieve for the Indigenous women and girls who are missing and murdered. To support staff learning, the history and protocols for the event have been posted on the staff intranet. Each year, some VPL staff have participated in the march. VPL also displays digitized images of the 120 panels of the Women’s Memorial March quilt in an online gallery in our digital repository, This Vancouver. The quilt was created by friends, family and community members to honour the memories of the murdered and missing women and is carried every year during the march.

Goal 3. Respect Indigenous Self Determination and the Inherent Right of Self Government

Objectives

- Build and formalize sustainable long-term relationships, agreements, and communications protocols with local Nations and urban Indigenous communities.
- Advance Indigenous participation in the leadership, governance and/or oversight of VPL and respond meaningfully to the leadership and priorities of local Nations and urban Indigenous communities.

Actions Undertaken from 2022 to 2024

- **Invitations to Trustee Roles.** Since 2021, VPL has invited Indigenous applicants for Board Trustee roles in advance of the City Clerk’s application process. The Chief Librarian and CEO emails key contacts from the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, noting the responsibilities of library trustees, clarifying that the current Library Act requires trustees to be residents or electors in Vancouver, which currently includes residents of Musqueam, and that VPL is exploring legislative change to broaden eligibility

to all members of the three local Nations. This has resulted in inquiries; however, no members have expressed interest in roles on the Board as of 2024.

- **Action Group 12: Institutional Representation.** Described above, this initiative on inclusive governance will explore with the local Nations how they would like to be involved in library governance, both including and beyond the VPL Board as it is currently structured and legislated.

Goal 4. Honour the Rights and Title of Indigenous Peoples

Objectives

- Proactively align VPL's policies, practices, and processes to respect the unique rights and title of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.
- Ensure the standards for Indigenous rights established in UNDRIP are guideposts for the development, implementation, and evaluation of VPL policies, practices, services and programming.

Actions Undertaken from 2022 to 2024

- **Indigenous Considerations as part of reports and policies.** Since 2020, VPL's Board and Committee reports and policies specifically address considerations or implications for Indigenous Peoples. VPL created a framework for senior staff and Board Trustees outlining considerations such as: the impacts that a policy, program or service could have on Indigenous communities; the need for conversations with Indigenous groups or organizations to inform policies and services; and identifying opportunities to uphold and embed Indigenous rights and Reconciliation.
- **Repatriation policy** – VPL has identified the need for a repatriation policy to address material in the collection that is by or about Indigenous Peoples and may not respect Indigenous knowledge protocols. Development of this policy began in 2024 and will continue in 2025. It will include principles in the approach to Indigenous data sovereignty, how to contact VPL about these works, and examples of options that VPL may consider, e.g. repatriation, permissions, sharing.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to participate in the City of Vancouver's UNDRIP Action Plan processes, including the continued planning and implementation of the three actions described above and the sequencing of future actions listed in the City's UNDRIP Strategy.

Staff will also continue to undertake existing and new activities to fulfill the goals of VPL's Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy. An action plan outlining timelines, responsibilities and deliverables will be updated.

Staff will continue to report to the VPL Board on the progress of actions, within the Indigenous Relations section of the quarterly strategic plan progress report. A progress report against the action plan will also be provided.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications of each of the actions are considered as they are developed, and additional funding sources are requested when VPL's resources within the operating budget are not adequate to meet VPL's goals. Indigenous collections at VPL, which are available at all locations, are funded and maintained within the operating budget. Additional funding sources have included VPL's reserve funds and donors through the VPL Foundation for public programs and art, and the Province of BC for the Inclusive Governance/Institutional Representation initiative.