

MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: February 19, 2025
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TO: Library Board
FROM: Ziming Yang, 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 2024 that are supported by provincial funding. This report follows a prescribed template.

PURPOSE

This report is for decision.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the 2024 Provincial Library Grant Report.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee expressed interest in hearing a summary of the latest public survey findings which were referenced in the report. They clarified that one-time provincial funding was not used to address cyber security, and commented that the information is helpful for them to understand some of the challenges the Library faces.

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 2024 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 three parts, this section allows libraries to: provide information about the library and its communities, summarize the year's activities in an executive summary style, and identify major focus areas for the library over the past year.

Featured Initiatives: This section is tailored for libraries to elaborate on notable initiatives undertaken in 2024. Special emphasis should be placed on initiatives facilitated by the Provincial Enhancement Grants.

Challenges: This section allows libraries to elaborate on the key challenges faced in the past year, including a scale/rating, and an area to describe the library's response to each challenge (as applicable).

DISCUSSION

VPL's 2024 Provincial Public Library Grant report is attached for approval. It will be submitted to the Province to meet the March 1st deadline following approval from the VPL Board.

2024 PROVINCIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY GRANT REPORT (PLGR)

LIBRARY NAME:

Vancouver Public Library

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 744,800 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 affordability, the climate emergency, neighborhood, 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. There are more than 2,400 people experiencing homelessness and many more who are on the precarious edge of homelessness. Vancouver residents continue to be severely impacted by the mix of long-standing mental health and public health crises. These societal challenges affect VPL as staff deal with increased numbers of security incidents.

VPL's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan includes four strategic priorities grounded in VPL's mission, vision and values: Learning & Creativity; Shared Spaces & Experiences; Belonging & Connection; and Organizational Strength. Underpinning these is a commitment to advancing Indigenous reconciliation.

2024 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. Use the Featured Initiatives section starting on the next page to go into more detail on specific projects.

In 2024, VPL saw continuing recovery of library usage, recording over 4.8 million in-person visits and nearly 11 million digital and physical items borrowed. Interest in Library programs continued, with total program participation of over 175,000.

Municipal and provincial funding as well as one-time grants and donor contributions enable VPL to provide service that is highly valued by Vancouver residents. A 2024 public survey reports 97% of residents believe that VPL is an important part of the community, and 88% of patrons are satisfied or very satisfied with library service. Along with measuring levels of satisfaction, VPL also assessed the Library's impact on users. Reflecting our commitment to advancing Reconciliation, 73% reported that VPL helped them increase their understanding and respect for Indigenous people's histories, cultures and rights. These Reconciliation efforts were strengthened in 2024 by aligning with, and actively contributing to, the City of Vancouver's UNDRIP action plan.

VPL's excellent reputation and service delivery faced numerous challenges in 2024. Increasing political polarization fueled tensions at both staff and public levels, making it more difficult to provide nonpartisan service and maintain a respectful workplace. This was compounded by continued social issues which directly impact library staff who are working on the front lines. A number of initiatives outlined in this report sought to address these challenges - ranging from increased security and creation of new community focused roles, to enhanced staff training.

The high cost of living in Vancouver and changes to sick leave provisions in the Employment Standards Act made it very difficult to maintain current operations within existing budgets. Substantial effort was put toward stabilizing operating hours, however the increased cost of service delivery and lack of staff prevented VPL from offering consistent seven day a week service at all locations.

Also in 2024, public libraries across Canada faced the very real risk of cybersecurity threats, and VPL staff prioritized actions to prepare for and address potential threats.

Major Themes

Use the checkboxes below to indicate which areas your library primarily focused on this year. These themes should be reflected in the Featured Initiatives section starting on the next page, and/or in the Year in Review section above. We recommend choosing only the top 3-5 most relevant themes.

- Staffing
- Facilities
- Strategic planning and governance
- Collections
- Technology
- Programming
- Community outreach
- Emergency preparedness
- Accessibility and inclusion
- Environmental sustainability, climate action
- Mental health and wellness
- Reconciliation and Indigenous relations
- Other:

FEATURED INITIATIVES

Use this section to provide detail on up to four significant initiatives the library has undertaken in the past year, focusing particularly on use of the Enhancement Grants. Use one page per initiative. To add more pages, select Yes for "I have more initiatives to report" at the bottom of this page.

Initiative Title (#1) Enter a brief, descriptive title for your initiative.
Addressing urgent community needs
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>In 2024, VPL piloted a new Community Access Worker role to support the needs of marginalized community members in the Northeast area of the city. It provides support in accessing government forms (e.g. housing, income, and senior services), delivers unique programs that welcome patrons who are typically excluded from social environments, and creates new connections with groups such as Indigenous seniors and barriered job-seekers through partnerships with community service agencies. This role also builds capacity for VPL staff across our 21 locations through training and partner connections, enhancing services beyond the Northeast neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Also in 2024, VPL applied provincial funding to provide additional capacity for our Community Librarian team. This freed them up to work outside our branches in community environments that are challenging to access and take significant investment to build trust and relationships. New service partners included halfway houses, where we connected patrons with resources to support job searches and positive integration into society; Urban Indigenous community groups who are challenging to identify and serve in culturally appropriate ways; and grassroots food security networks serving people who are not well connected to government or civic services. Our Community Librarians used these opportunities to introduce people to library resources that support their learning and cultural goals, increasing their access to services that help them thrive.</p> <p>Additional security staff added in 2023 continue to provide support in high incident locations. The combination of supportive community roles and security oversight is designed to ensure the safety and comfort of both patrons and staff.</p>
Timeline and Progress Report What is the expected timeline for this initiative? What is the current status (e.g. planning, implementation, complete, ongoing). 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?

The Community Access role was introduced in July 2024 and will continue as a pilot through 2025. Early indications are that this approach is effective.

Enabling Community Librarians to focus on proactively developing relationships with partner organizations helps staff connect more patrons with the services they need, in a more timely manner.

Additional security staff were put into place in mid 2023 and continued through 2024. This has helped to set clear expectations of behaviour and mitigated staff and patron tensions. VPL intends to continue providing this level of security through 2025.

These three actions are mutually beneficial and work together to both prevent and address patron challenges experienced in our high incident branches.

Budgetary Information

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

All three of these actions are exclusively funded through Provincial Enhancement Grants, which run out at the end of March 2026. Freeing Community Librarians up to undertake more outreach is achieved by funding additional part-time hours for backfill roles to provide direct patron service in the branch. Both additional security and the Community Access role are dependent on this one-time funding source.

Rationale

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

Vancouver continues to face crises of homelessness, mental health and addiction. This is amplified in VPL's Northeast and downtown locations, where the proportion of security incidents are highest. In these locations staff are facing increasingly challenging working conditions, dealing with the threat of physical and verbal assaults.

The combination of increased security and more community outreach is intended to support both staff and patrons.

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.

Thanks to additional outreach by the Community Librarian team, VPL has been invited to participate in three additional major community events led by or focused on Indigenous residents. These events have supported visibility of VPL and public libraries as advocates for Indigenous interests and have led to new relationships that will allow deeper partnerships with Indigenous community members in future years.

Initiative Title (#2)

Enter a brief, descriptive title for your initiative.

Strengthening VPL

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.

Activities undertaken to strengthen VPL staff's ability to deal with increasingly challenging working conditions and bolster resilience were a priority for 2024. Key activities included additional training programs, hosting a staff wellness conference, and hiring a temporary project manager to review and update the staff onboarding process.

Ensuring all staff attend core training continued to be a priority in 2024. Based on stellar reviews from initial participants, Crucial Conversations enhanced training was provided to supervisory staff to help deal with challenging interactions.

VPL's second annual Wellness Conference took place in November 2024. With staff facing increasingly stressful work, the Wellness Conference provided staff with resources to support their physical and mental wellbeing, to showcase and share their expertise and talent, and an opportunity to connect with one another away from the pressures of the public service environment. The conference was planned and led by staff volunteers.

In fall 2024, a temporary position was created to review and redesign the staff onboarding process and core training framework, and also oversee VPL's EDI action plan implementation. The onboarding review is designed to effectively integrate new hires into the organization, providing them with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed for long-term success while promoting a thriving workplace culture. The revamped onboarding experience will foster greater engagement among new hires, helping them feel comfortable and confident in delivering exceptional service. It will also ensure they are better prepared to embrace and embody the library's values.

Timeline and Progress Report

What is the expected timeline for this initiative? What is the current status (e.g. planning, implementation, complete, ongoing). 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?

Crucial Conversations training was offered to all VPL managers and supervisors; 90% of these employees completed the course. Three managers attended enhanced training so that they can deliver this course to staff going forward.

More than 400 staff attended the conference with overwhelmingly positive feedback, and VPL intends to continue this annual event, contingent on funding.

The onboarding evaluation began in 2024, is scheduled to continue through 2025 along with the redesign of core training, with roll-out of both anticipated in early 2026.

Budgetary Information

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

Enhancement Grant funding has been applied to the cost of delivering training, as well as to backfill costs incurred to enable public service staff to attend training. It supported the delivery of VPL's Wellness Conference in 2023 and 2024, and has been allocated to 2025 conference costs as well.

The project manager role overseeing the review and redesign of the onboarding process, core training, and EDI implementation is a two-year assignment funded by the Provincial Enhancement Grant.

Rationale

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

Library staff are dealing with a vastly different work environment from the one that which existed a decade ago, necessitating an updated approach to training staff. Enabling our staff to deal with increasingly challenging situations and providing tools to strengthen their own resilience is critical to providing skilled and sensitive public service. Updates to our hiring and onboarding processes will help us recruit and retain staff who understand the current reality of library work.

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.

Delivering relevant and meaningful library service relies on staff who are prepared to deal with the complex social issues of a large urban environment. Additional training, a revamped onboarding process, and a chance to develop a strong network of colleagues will equip staff with the skills and knowledge they need to effectively support the patrons they serve and each other.

Initiative Title (#3)

Enter a brief, descriptive title for your initiative.

Indigenous Relations/Strategic planning

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.

In 2024, the VPL Board adopted the City’s UNDRIP Action Plan and agreed to collaborate on implementation of the relevant actions with the local Nations and City’s intergovernmental table. This leverages VPL’s activities related to our Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation Strategy, which was approved in 2022.

One of VPL’s deliverables is to “...develop recommendations for changes to VPL governance and relevant legislation to ensure governance practices align to Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh priorities for representation.” (COV UNDRIP Action Group 12: Institutional Representation)

In preparation for development of VPL’s strategic plans beyond 2025, a public survey was undertaken in late 2024 to measure levels of awareness, usage, and attitudes among the general population of Vancouver residents.

Timeline and Progress Report

What is the expected timeline for this initiative? What is the current status (e.g. planning, implementation, complete, ongoing). 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?

VPL staff developed a project charter outlining the scope of work, deliverables and timelines for the inclusive governance project. To date, a comprehensive environmental scan to describe the landscape of consultation and inclusive governance with First Nations in BC has been developed as a means of setting the context. Initial discussions with the three host Nations is scheduled for early 2025.

Budgetary Information

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

VPL's work corresponds to work on inclusive governance underway at VPL at the direction of the Board, which received one-time funding from the Provincial Government.

The public survey was enabled by funding from the Enhancement Grant.

Rationale

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

VPL 2020-2025 Strategic Plan includes two specific goals related to Truth & Reconciliation: *Reflect and celebrate Indigenous cultures and history* and *Enhance understanding and appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing*, in addition to seeking opportunities to act on the Calls to Action of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission across all goals.

Undertaking public research enables VPL to measure progress of our current Strategic Plan, and is an important step in identifying opportunities and determining priorities for future planning.

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.

VPL's work to explore options for greater participation from Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations in VPL's governance will not only advance reconciliation and UNDRIP strategies for Vancouver but will provide learning for other public libraries.

Measuring public support for VPL and satisfaction with our services allows VPL to report back to our stakeholders. In 2024, 88% of residents surveyed said they were satisfied or very satisfied with VPL. 97% of VPL patrons feel welcome in the Library, 85% believe the Library helps them connect with their community, and 73% of VPL patrons report the Library has helped increase their understanding and respect for Indigenous peoples' histories, cultures, and rights.

CHALLENGES

The following topics have been identified as recurrent themes in prior years' PLGRs, along with challenges that have surfaced throughout the current year.

Select the level of concern each challenge presents for your library.

Financial pressure (e.g., rising costs, reduced revenues, forecasting uncertainty, local budget)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

VPL continues to face pressures associated with labour and supply cost inflation, increased demand for public services, aging infrastructure, and higher costs passed on from external agencies. Changes to sick time legislation and increased expectations around staying home while sick have made it more difficult to maintain current service levels within existing budgets. Approximately 75% of our budget is staffing; while one-time provincial grant funding is helpful, it cannot be applied to our areas of greatest need, which is for ongoing/ permanent staffing.

Governance (e.g., changes on the library board, relationship/conversations with local government)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

VPL is actively seeking ways to increase participation by the local Nations in library governance.

Emergency response (e.g., fires, floods, extreme weather)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

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, and this work was completed in 2024.

Staffing (e.g., recruitment and retention, mental health, and wellness)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

Staff turnover, a high proportion of auxiliary staff, and the high cost of living in Vancouver have made recruitment and retention one of VPL's greatest challenges.

Like other service and government agencies with public facing staff, VPL has been impacted by increased public incivility and violence, staff need for more employer support in the areas of mental health and flexibility, and continued challenges in filling evening and weekend shifts. Changes to provincial sick leave legislation has increased benefit costs for part-time and auxiliary staff members, resulting in the instability of longstanding auxiliary staffing models in public libraries like VPL. Vancouver's continued affordability crisis contributes to recruitment challenges in filling roles at all levels, particularly entry-level frontline service positions.

These factors have made it difficult to meet public service commitments. 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)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

Infrastructure/facilities (e.g., aging/damaged, renovations, new builds/upgrades/expansions)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

VPL's aging infrastructure is an ongoing challenge, with construction inflation significantly impacting the cost of infrastructure renewal, and higher costs for maintenance of VPL's assets. The revitalization of the Children's Library at Central and the development of a new branch at the former Oakridge site are major capital projects underway.

Community access to the library (e.g., geographic isolation, lack of local public transit, building accessibility)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

Disappearing services in the community (e.g., government, banking, health)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

In 2024, federal cuts to services for newcomers were announced, to take effect in Q1 2025. Partner programs serving newcomers began folding operations in late 2024, impacting VPL's ability to serve these patrons.

Public health (e.g., COVID-19, vaccinations, access to Telehealth)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

Regulatory impacts (e.g., accessibility, privacy, employment standards)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

The changes to paid sick day requirements through the Employment Standards Act has added significant unfunded payroll cost pressures to VPL. In addition, recent changes in the calculation of WorkSafe BC costs, and increases to WorkSafe rates, has resulted in an increase in projected WorkSafe expenditures. The addition of a second-tier contribution for Canadian Pension Plan will result in an increase to VPL's Canada Pension Plan expenditures, and the cost of extended health and dental services has increased based on higher cost of services and utilization.

Vulnerable communities (e.g., people experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health crisis)*

- High Concern
- Moderate Concern
- Low Concern
- Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

The increasing social issues seen throughout Vancouver (homelessness, poverty, substance use disorders, mental illness, and crime) directly impacts VPL staff who are on the front lines. To try to address this VPL has deployed more security staff and added training, as noted above.

Sociopolitical tensions (e.g. intellectual freedom, protests, global events, racism, homophobia)*

High Concern

Moderate Concern

Low Concern

Not a Concern

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

Socio-political tensions related to global conflicts and growing social inequality have resulted in pressure from patrons and VPL staff to take positions on polarizing topics. This created a need to communicate both internally and externally about the library's role as a non-partisan organization, and expectations of behaviour for public servants. There is an increasing intolerance of different opinions for both staff and members of the public, and this has resulted in conflict that has threatened VPL's reputation and relationships.

Other (please specify) - Cybersecurity

High Concern

Moderate Concern

Low Concern

N/A

Describe how the challenge has affected your library in the past year, and what actions your library has taken to address it. If no action was taken, explain what the barriers are. If the issue is of low concern, you may leave this field blank.

During 2023 and 2024, libraries have emerged as a target for bad actors with cybersecurity events causing significant service disruption at public libraries including Toronto, Seattle, and Calgary. The threat landscape continues to evolve, with cybersecurity experts viewing it as the most challenging within the past five years. Along with organizations in other sectors, public libraries are investing substantially in improvements to their cybersecurity programs.

BOARD APPROVAL

Download the board approval signature form from the Public Libraries Branch website here: <LINK>

Upload the signed form by clicking the button below.