Vancouver Public Library

# MANAGEMENT REPORT

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| Date: | March 20, 2018 |
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| TO: | VPL Board |
| FROM: | Kay Cahill, Acting Director, Collections & Technology |
| **SUBJECT:** | **Smart Cities Challenge** |

## SUMMARY

The Canadian Smart Cities Challenge offers municipalities the opportunity to compete for a $50 million award by submitting project proposals that use data and connected technologies to address pressing societal problems and improve the lives of citizens. The cities of Vancouver and Surrey have formed a partnership for the challenge, and this report summarizes VPL's involvement.

## PURPOSE

This report is for discussion.

## STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

One of the themes of the Smart City challenge is empowerment and inclusion, which aligns with VPL's Access & Equity goal. The challenge also offers opportunities that could support a range of objectives in the plan.

## BACKGROUND

In 2017 Infrastructure Canada announced the Canadian Smart Cities Challenge [https://impact.canada.ca/en/challenges/smart-cities ], in which communities from across Canada compete for a $50 million award to improve their community through the use of technology. The challenge is open to municipalities, regional governments and Indigenous communities.

The following background information is drawn from the Smart Cities Challenge website.

The Smart Cities Challenge:

- encourages innovation by challenging communities to create new partnerships and achieve meaningful outcomes for residents through the use of data and connected technology.
- requires meaningful engagement of residents, from the initial selection of priorities up to development of solutions.
- will bring together a broad cross section of stakeholders, including government departments, the private sector, non-profits, educational institutions and individuals.
- involves: a problem + a vision + a solution + data driven measurements for success.

The first part of the process is for applicants to define a challenge statement for their community. The challenge statement is "a single sentence that defines the outcome or outcomes a community aims to achieve by implementing its smart cities proposal." The challenge statement is required to be measurable, ambitious, and achievable through the use of data and connected technology.

### *Sample Challenge Statement for "Empowerment and Inclusivity"*

*Our community will ensure that every person without a home has access to nightly shelter, and will connect 100% of vulnerable residents with the services, activities and programs that are known to reduce the risk of homelessness.*

Finalists will be announced in summer 2018 and will receive a $250,000 grant to develop their final proposal. The final proposal will establish milestones and outcomes, the project plan, and the formal partnerships that finalists will undertake to help them implement their projects. The independent jury will select the winners in spring 2019.

Implementation of the winning proposal is expected to take between 2-5 years, and lessons learned will be shared with communities across Canada.

**DISCUSSION**

VPL was invited to join the City of Vancouver's Smart Cities steering committee in July 2017. Christina de Castell, Director, Collections & Technology has been participating on behalf of VPL. The City's partnership with Surrey was announced in February 2018. Additionally, Director Christina de Castell and Manager, Digital Services, Kay Cahill participated in planning activities with senior staff from both cities in February 2018.

Through the Smarter Together website (https://www.smartertogether.ca/) the two cities are sharing information about the challenge and inviting the public to submit ideas directly. The ideas are being gathered under six broad themes: empowerment and inclusion, environmental quality, economic opportunity, healthy living and recreation, and safety and security. The public have shared around 300 ideas to date, with the majority falling under the mobility theme. The site allows for voting and commenting on proposed ideas.

### *Selected Ideas from the Smarter Together Site*

*Liquid democracy for municipal issues: every citizen can vote for or against every piece of legislation. If you don't or aren't able to vote, you can nominate a trusted representative to represent you. The system will check how they voted and automatically adopt their position.*

*Create incubator labs for health innovation: a fully equipped, shared space built on a co-op model where biotech start-ups can access the lab space, equipment, expertise and data they need to refine and develop new ideas.*

*Link 911 and 311 in major Canadian cities: build a resilient system to manage disruption in the event of major critical infrastructure failures.*

At VPL, two rounds of activities are taking place to generate and refine ideas from library staff.

Following an initial briefing on the Smart City Challenge and associated technologies, each work unit held an activity session where staff brainstormed solutions to some of the challenges currently facing Vancouver in the six theme areas listed above. The ideas generated by each activity were then posted to an intranet forum for other staff to view and comment on.

### *Selected Ideas from the VPL Unit Activities*

*Gamification of city exploration through a mobile app that encourages people to better themselves or help others who reside within the city. The app would feature points-based challenges and activities that require moving through the city or learning more about it. Activities would be targeted toward benefiting or helping certain community groups, e.g. guiding marginalized youth to spaces where they can acquire new skills or helping recent immigrants familiarize themselves with city resources.*

*Tech enhancements added to playgrounds, or the creation of new tech-inspired outdoor children's museum spaces across the city including multilingual voice activated stories/rhymes, large ebook screens with stories provided by the library, and interfaces with activity ideas from local service providers.*

*A skytrain car or even a whole train containing library labs – creation spaces, maker labs, a meeting and programming space for a slam poetry workshop, an ESL conversation, a resume workshop – that runs along the Expo line from Vancouver to Surrey.*

*Immediate language translator earpieces for every front line public service provider in the city (library staff, hospital staff, police, etc)*

The work unit activities will be followed by three system-wide engagement sessions facilitated by a team of staff champions. VPL is also in discussion with the City of Vancouver about hosting an in-person public consultation at the Central Library ahead of the challenge submission deadline. Throughout the engagement phase, staff will be prepared to answer questions from the public.

## FINAL REMARKS

The Smart Cities Challenge, and in particular the Empowerment & Inclusion theme, aligns well with VPL's broader mandate and goals. The challenge is a great opportunity for us to engage with staff and the public about ways in which technology could improve the lives of citizens both within our communities and across Canada, and to ensure that library services and values are represented in the proposal that Vancouver and Surrey put forward in April.