

Our Journey...

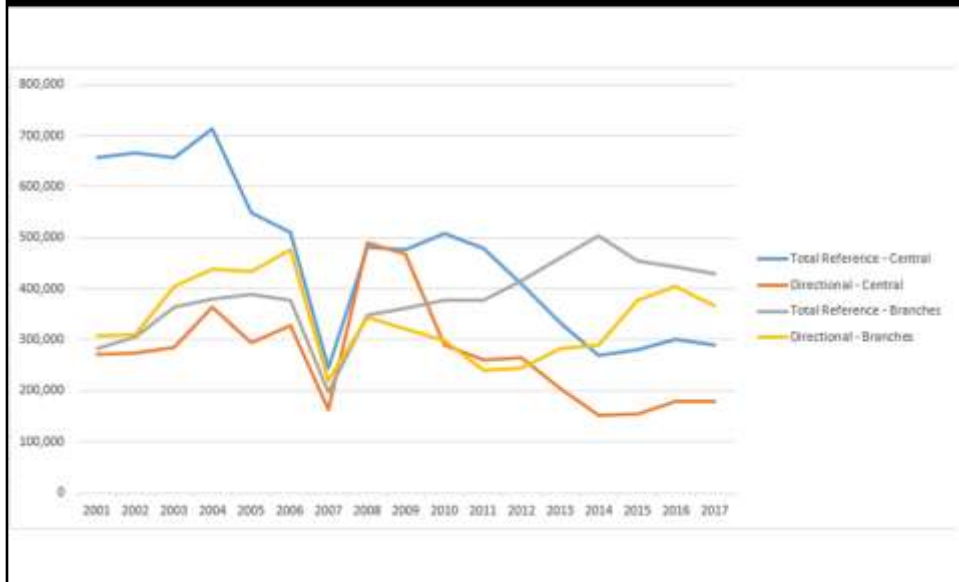


I'd like to ask each of you to think about public libraries and the reason why visit them. My hunch is that many of you thought about books, reading, information and research. While these are core activities of public libraries, and our commitment to supporting literacies and offering authoritative sources of information remains, today public libraries have a much broader range of services and opportunities that support the information, education and social needs of the communities they serve.

The mission of the Vancouver Public Library is a free place for everyone to discover, create, and share ideas and information. While the phrasing will be different, public libraries across North America build their services around these principles. Public libraries strive to offer barrier free opportunities for learning, creation, storytelling, and cultural expression, and specialize in building social capital within their communities. Public libraries have been proven to have significant positive economic impact and are critical drivers in creating desirable social outcomes such as social inclusion, respect for diversity, creative output, and connectedness. Libraries reach into the community is also significant. Across all its locations, the Vancouver Public Library welcomes close to 7 million people each year.

Libraries are a strong contributor to the cultural ecosystem and today, one of my goals is to provide some insight into the role libraries play in supporting and growing the cultural economy and to invite you, if you have not already, to engage with your local public library.

The Case for Change



The graph shown here depicts changes in reference statistics at our Central Library and the branches. The blue line shows the total number of reference questions at the Central Library. The chart begins in 2001 and while not the peak in terms of the number of questions answered, it gives a sense of former business levels. Between 2004 and 2011, VPL's questions declined 33%. Coupled with unfavourable changes in borrowing trends, we knew that something transformational needed to happen. Like all libraries we were experiencing the pressures of the wide spread adoption of technology, changes in our communities, demographics, funding, and the ways that our public interact with the library.

In 2011, VPL began a multi-year process of restructuring our organization from the management level through to the frontline staffing level.

The process involved reviewing all areas of our business, from management to our public services to our back of house services. We did multiple service reviews, all of which defined new directions and recommended guiding principles to shape and completely transformation of our service delivery models.

The intention was not to tweak our models or reassign a few staff members to other areas, but to offer something completely different. – a new way of meeting our publics' needs.

We needed to address in a meaningful way the fact that the interests of our patrons had been shifting over the past decade but our service delivery models had remained essentially the same.

It is important to note, that we did not change our mission, vision and values statements as part of this transformation. The library remained and remains committed to our vision of "An engaged, informed and connected City" and our new service offerings are fully aligned with these statements and our goals.

Staff Engagement



Vancouver Public Library



VPL had undergone many smaller changes in the past with varying levels of success and staff acceptance of the change. We knew going into this transformation that we would be experiencing our biggest and most complex change yet. Staff understanding and buy for the transformation was key in order for us to be successful.

These were achieved through a robust change management program, a commitment to clear and transparent communication, solid research compiled by staff, and effective project management.

Staff input and involvement wherever and whenever possible was a key goal for ensuring that staff felt engaged in the process and were contributing to the decisions that were being made. Sharing information as it happened meant that staff had to deal with unknowns, uncertainty and even changes in direction. The trade off however was inclusion and understanding of the process.



One of the outcomes of our transformation was that considerably fewer staff were required to handle our information and borrower services. We were able to reinvest that staff effort into emerging and strategic areas of interest and create new opportunities to demonstrate our relevance to Vancouverites.

In 2015, after extensive community and expert consultation, we opened the Inspiration Lab. The Inspiration Lab is a free space dedicated to digital creativity, collaboration and storytelling.

The sound booths and the equipment are free to use with a Vancouver Public Library card. The Inspiration Lab also offers high performance computers with audio and video editing software for beginners and advanced users to complete post production work on their recordings.

In 2017, we opened the Bud Osborn Creation Studio at our náca?mat ct Strathcona Branch in Vancouver's downtown eastside. As we develop or renovate our branches we are looking for opportunities to add labs and creation spaces.

Since opening numerous local creators, including musicians, podcasters and filmmakers, have used our lab facilities to produce audio, video and digital creations that would cost thousands of dollars to create in a commercial studio.



Building an understanding of and respect for cultural diversity is another area where VPL and other libraries have invested effort. Through partnerships with cultural groups, libraries are able to offer culturally diverse performances to their community. These serve not only to build intercultural understanding but also educate and foster appreciation for a variety of cultural expressions. Pictured here is a Bollywood style dance performance that took place last month as part of our celebration of Diwali. This was the first performance to occur on the feature staircase in our recently opened upper levels.

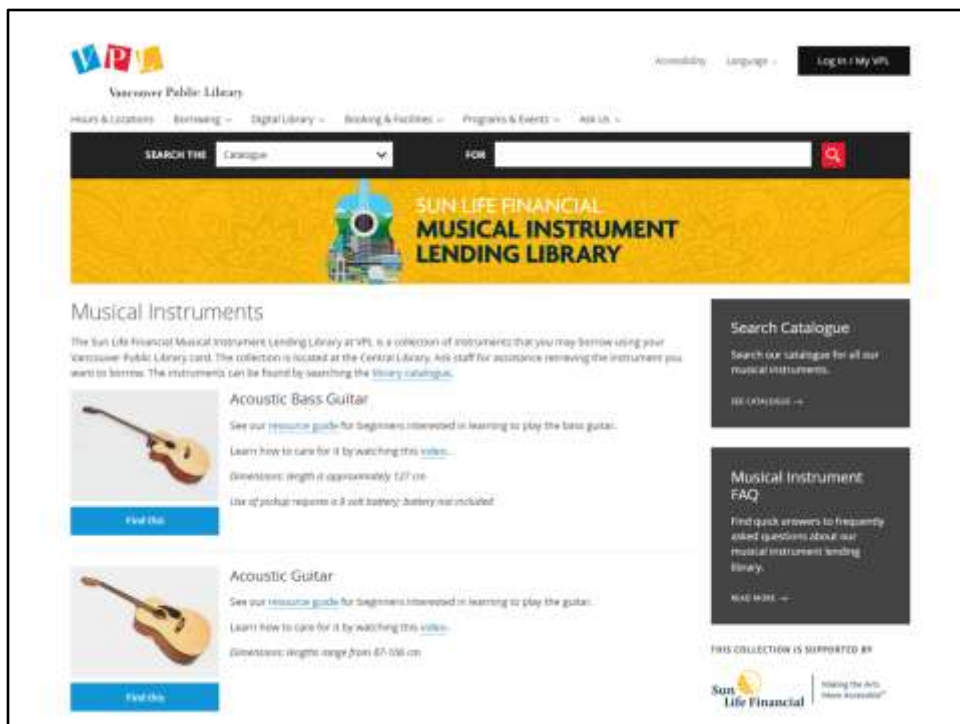
A number of key elements are required to build a city with a strong cultural identity. Public Libraries contribute to a city's cultural framework by offering support for artists and performers, providing access to spaces and places, and creating receptive and engaged audiences.

Free public programming for adults and children is a core business activity of the public library. Partnering to offer programs that include cultural performances or that support creation or education are part of our suite of offerings.

The Central Library receives an average of 5,500 people per day making this an ideal venue both in terms of the physical space but also in audience generation.



Strategic partnerships are key to demonstrating our relevance and allow us to offer a diverse range of opportunities and experiences to our community. Pictured here is an information table for the Human Library project that was offered at VPL through a partnership with the PuSH International Performing Arts Festival. As a venue partner for PuSH, we are able to offer them unique spaces, advertising and an audience for their performances. .



Remaining relevant to our community is an area that demands ongoing attention. VPL must constantly look for opportunities to present new services and offerings. In a climate of continued economic pressures, forming partnerships is key to our being able to meet our goals in this area. In 2016, VPL launched the Sun Life Financial Musical Instrument Lending Library. Through this partnership, we now offer our members over 280 string and percussion musical instruments. Instrument lending is just one of the many ways that we have broadened our lending services beyond the book.



The last initiative I'd like to share with you today is our Inspiration Pass.

The Vancouver Inspiration Pass is a free cultural and recreational pass program that allows families and teens to get out and explore their city in a whole new way. VPL's lending infrastructure makes experience lending possible.

Thanks to the program's 27 partner venues, Vancouver residents can use their free library card to check out the best that their city can offer – including popular attractions, museums, heritage sites, fitness facilities, world-class gardens and cultural performances.

Created to increase community engagement and inclusivity and support lifelong learning, the pass provides opportunities for Vancouver residents – regardless of socio-economic status – to benefit from the many diverse cultural, learning and recreation activities offered throughout Vancouver.



At VPL our transformation journey is far from over. We do not have plans to undergo another huge transformative. We have moved to a place where we are more agile and change in our organization is ongoing and iterative. We are constantly scanning the landscape to determine our strategic priorities and the best path to remaining relevant to Vancouverites. Going back to where I began, my hope today is that I have piqued your curiosity and have you thinking about the opportunities and the potential that can be provided through change. As you continue on your own journeys, I would encourage you to think about where synergies with your local library may occur.