

MANAGEMENT REPORT

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Meeting Date: February 24, 2021
TO: Library Board
FROM: Julia Morrison, Director, Corporate Services & Facilities
Dawn Ibey, Director, Library Experience
SUBJECT: **Phased COVID Recovery Plan for Programs and Rentals**

SUMMARY

This report outlines VPL's plans for gradual restoration of public programs and facilities rentals using a phased approach that follows public health guidelines and restores in-person activities with consideration to staff capacity and financial constraints.

PURPOSE

This report is for information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board receive the report for information.

POLICY

The phased approach that the Library will take to restarting programs and rentals during COVID-19 gathering restrictions and after they are lifted is aligned with VPL policy. As stated in the *Programming at VPL* policy, programming is integral to library service to support the strategic goals of the Library, respond to emerging community interests and sustain demonstrated interests and demands.

The VPL *Public Meeting Rooms & Facilities Use* policy states that "the primary purpose of the Library's meeting rooms and facilities is to provide space for Library programs or services that are aligned with our values and goals, delivered by library staff or in partnership with individuals and organizations" and that "a secondary purpose is to provide accessible and affordable meeting spaces for use by the public."

INDIGENOUS CONSIDERATIONS

VPL is committed to being a place to learn about the history and cultures of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This includes learning about the truths of the historic and ongoing impact of colonization and the importance of movement toward Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

In-person programs are critical to building connection within community and with this history to reach our goals related to Truth & Reconciliation. VPL's programs that are intended to enhance understanding and appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, like the Indigenous Storyteller in Residence, do not have the same opportunities to connect people to stories and each other without the use of VPL branches and meeting rooms, although some digital programs may have a greater reach in terms of numerical participation and for those living outside the Vancouver area.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

VPL's strategic plans over the past eight years have emphasized access and equity; this has led to extensive work by staff to build relationships with community groups and community members who have not always been represented in Library programming. While hosting digital programs continues to offer opportunities for participation, in-person programs are more likely to build a greater sense of belonging and connection with other participants and the Library, as they benefit from unplanned interactions.

VPL programs and rentals support the strategic plan priorities of Learning & Creativity, Shared Spaces & Experiences, and Belonging & Connection.

BACKGROUND

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the Library closed all locations on March 16, 2020, and paused all in-person programs, rentals and filming activity. Provincial health orders were introduced that placed restrictions on gatherings, including space and distancing requirements and limitations on the numbers of attendees. These orders have changed and evolved throughout the course of the pandemic.

Following the closure, VPL quickly transitioned its programming to a virtual model. An extensive suite of programs is currently being offered to support children and families, and adult audiences. The Library has maintained the diversity of its programs, offering virtual storytime sessions, bookclubs, digital skills programs, job search programs, and sessions delivered by both the Writer in Residence and the Indigenous Storyteller in Residence. A number of these programs are being done in partnership with other agencies who have similarly moved their programs and services online.

Participation rates for virtual programs continue to be high after reopening, suggesting that demand for both in-person and virtual programs will extend beyond the pandemic. Looking ahead, VPL's longer term service model will include a mix of in-person and virtual programs.

Limited rental activity was restored in October 2020 for filming and micro-weddings, as permitted by the provincial orders related to COVID at that time. A limitation on gatherings outside of immediate households was introduced in November 2020, and is currently in place indefinitely. Health restrictions related to gatherings and physical distancing are anticipated to continue until at least October 2021, when it is currently projected that the majority of people in BC will be immunized.

As VPL works to restore full operations, staffing has yet to reach pre-COVID levels and as a result, capacity remains limited in most areas of service delivery. Staffing challenges exist due to several reasons, including staff sickness, staff self-isolating requirements, and the need for recruitment to fill vacant roles that arose due to retirements and attrition.

DISCUSSION

Given the expectation of ongoing gathering restrictions and the staffing challenges that VPL is facing, the Library is implementing a phased approach to restarting programs, rentals and filming. Staff expect ongoing restrictions to include limits on the number of people who are permitted at an event for a period of time after October 2021, such as the restoration of the previous limit of 50, as well as distancing requirements at events.

When all orders are lifted, there will still be additional considerations for VPL in bringing back services that are not core to the Library, such as rentals. These include potential continued exposure risks for staff, limited financial resources, and limited capacity to redirect staff time to special events or large events.

Staff will incrementally restore programs and rentals that are permissible within health restrictions during 2021 and 2022. VPL will prioritize restoration of space use based on the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, with a preference for Library-delivered programs and partnership programs. Resumption of rentals will also consider potential health risks associated with the event, likelihood of achieving financial break-even status, and current health guidelines, with public facing rentals phased in starting with Strategic Partners, as defined below. In 2022, a review of the program and rentals model will be undertaken, along with public input about the types of rentals to be offered by the Library.

VPL will continue to provide access to the City of Vancouver for public consultation activities at cost based on availability, in alignment with Strategic Plan goal “Establish the Library as a forum for civic conversation and understanding” under the priority “Belonging & Connection”.

In addition, staff are exploring options for rentable meeting space equipped with the technology to host virtual meetings as a source of revenue.

Strategic Partner Model

The phased approach described below allows for public meetings and events held by organizations identified as Strategic Partners to resume in Q3 of 2021, if health restrictions permit. Strategic Partners are established organizations that have worked with VPL to deliver public programming in a sustained, mutually beneficial relationship over a period of three or more years. These organizations are familiar with the requirements of health regulations and are expected to meet them without VPL assistance; they are unlikely to introduce costs that the Library is unable to recover or support during COVID restart; and their programming priorities are expected to be in alignment with VPL's Strategic Plan priorities for 2020-2023.

Potential Strategic Partners will be invited to enter into partnership agreements for continued co-sponsorship of VPL in-person programs when they resume. Strategic Partners will have the opportunity to apply for an expedited room rental access process for their use of VPL facilities and meeting spaces on behalf of their organization. This streamlined approval process is anticipated to make it easier for Strategic Partners to make bookings, and is an outcome of consultation at the community thought leaders forum held during strategic planning.

Criteria for Strategic Partners

Registered not-for-profit organizations that have been Library Program Partners* for a recurring annual program, or at least three separate events within the past three years, and whose long term vision and goals align with VPL, will be considered as Strategic Partners. The delivery of the programs must have been within the terms of the *Programming at VPL* policy and *Public Meeting Rooms and Facilities Use* policy, and in support of VPL's vision, mission and goals.

A list of Strategic Partners will be presented to the VPL Directors Group for approval annually. Organizations may be added or removed from the Strategic Partners list throughout the year based on the established criteria, with the approval of the VPL Directors Group.

***Library Program Partner:** an individual or organization that contributes expertise, content, logistical support, presenters, or other elements in collaboration with the Library in order to produce or co-produce a program or series.

Alternative Partnerships

VPL will continue to partner with other organizations to present non-recurring programs that align with our values and strategic priorities.

Restart Phases

The following table details the phased approach that is being implemented to restart programs and rentals throughout 2021 and into 2022:

Phase	Estimated time	VPL Programs*	Rentals*
1	Q1 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A breadth of VPL virtual programs continue to be delivered for babies, children, teens, and adults Offerings include virtual storytime sessions, bookclubs, digital skills programs, job search programs and sessions delivered by the Indigenous Storyteller in Residence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private meetings, weddings and ceremonies Filming at Central Library Health care related events such as immunization clinics, COVID-19 testing centres and blood donor clinics** Use for local government, provincial or federal election purpose** Accredited educational institutions: exams, graduations and orientation activities for registered students**
2	Q2 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 programs continue, plus: Offerings include sessions delivered by the first of two Writers in Residence VPL small outdoor in-person programs (storytime, teen and adult bookclubs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 rentals continue, plus: Civic engagement activities delivered by government officials or elected officers, including planning and development consultations
3	Q3 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 2 programs continue, plus: VPL virtual programs continue with consideration given to the balance of virtual and in-person programming Sessions delivered by second Writer in Residence VPL small indoor in-person programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 2 rentals continue, plus: Job Fairs Rentals to Strategic Partners for public meetings
4	Q4 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 3 programs continue, plus: VPL programs with > 50 attendees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 3 rentals continue, plus: All rentals for private meetings/events Filming at VPL branches
5	Q1 2022	Review of programs, strategic partners, and rental activity/model Survey the public to gather opinions about priorities for rental offerings at the Library.	
6	2022	Program and rental activity restored, without COVID-related restrictions	

* Subject to Public Health guidelines

** These events are listed as exemptions in the January 8, 2021 Provincial Health Officer order

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A phased approach to restoring public programs and rentals ensures that public health guidelines are followed, and restores in-person activities with consideration to financial constraints.

Funding for VPL programming is approved at pre-COVID levels within the 2021 operating budget.

Room rental and event revenues are anticipated to be lower in 2021, but revenues will begin to be reintroduced in a measured way throughout the year. Staffing costs, particularly for auxiliary staffing, will be lower in 2021 as the number of events requiring auxiliary staffing will also be lower. The Strategic Partner model enables approved rental clients to apply for an expedited room rental access process on behalf of their organization. This streamlined approval process is anticipated to make it easier for Strategic Partners to make bookings, which may increase their usage and associated revenues.

FINAL REMARKS

VPL is committed to a reopening process that enables a safe return to in-person programs and rentals for staff and our community. The phasing for in-person public programs and rentals will be in alignment with, and adjusted as required by, the provincial health orders, and will consider indicators of public readiness to return for in person events.