

## MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: June 20, 2018  
Author: Kay Cahill, Acting Director, Collections & Technology  
Phone No.: 604-331-4070  
VanDocs#: DOC/2018/269365  
Meeting Date: June 27, 2018  
TO: Library Board  
FROM: Kay Cahill, Acting Director, Collections & Technology  
**SUBJECT: Multilingual Collection Strategy**

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### **SUMMARY**

This report proposes a change in strategy to improve the visibility and circulation of multilingual collections, moving from a model where small language collections are present in many branches to a more targeted approach with larger, richer collections in identified destination locations.

### **PURPOSE**

This report is for decision.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Library Board approve the implementation of a new approach to the development and deployment of multilingual collections<sup>1</sup> that improves the visibility and circulation of these materials, focusing on the consolidation of language materials in branch locations where they perform well to create deeper, richer collections that better serve the needs and interests of patrons.

### **COMMITTEE DISCUSSION**

The Committee discussed opportunities to expand VPL's collections in Indigenous languages, supporting recommendation 14 of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, and the

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<sup>1</sup> As an official language, French is not included in this recommendation for our multilingual collection. VPL French collections support mother tongue speakers, use in K-12 education, and a range of language learners.

potential to explore further improvements to multilingual services and programs at the Library, including sign language. Following discussion, the Committee moved to approve the recommendation.

## **POLICY**

VPL's Collection Development Policy describes the Library's commitment to developing robust and diverse collections to best serve and inspire our public and defines the scope of our collections. It includes objectives to meet the diverse needs and interests of individuals and to respect and reflect communities of various cultural, ethnic, religious and philosophical backgrounds. In addition, the policy observes that the library must also track social and demographic trends in order to build collections responsive to the needs of our users as they change over time. This includes maintaining an awareness of emerging languages and cultures, economic impacts on information needs, and broader changes in work and recreational habits.

## **CHIEF LIBRARIAN'S COMMENTS**

This report describes a first step in a renewed multilingual collections strategy, which will be followed by further activities related to collections. VPL recognizes that a robust evaluation of delivering multilingual services across the system is required to fully meet community needs. Activities in the 2017-2019 VPL Strategic Plan were amended to limit this assessment to collections due to capacity, and a broader assessment will be recommended as part of developing the next strategic plan.

## **STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS**

Initiative 1.6: Multilingual Collections Strategy supports the Learning, Creativity and Innovation outcome of VPL's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning goal in VPL 2020. This initiative is focused on VPL's approach to multilingual collections.

*Undertake an environmental scan of best practices for multilingual collections in large urban public libraries, research alternative procurement approaches, and consult language communities. Develop a strategy to enhance learning and literacy by improving the visibility and circulation of collections. Prioritize languages with poor performance and identify performance improvement targets.*

This recommendation addresses improving the visibility and circulation of collections.

## **BACKGROUND**

VPL collects material in sixteen languages other than English. Branch locations have language collections that represent the demographics in their neighbourhoods, while Central Library offers materials in the full range of collected languages. Staff's current practice is to use census

data to determine the location of branch collections, with historical choices also reflected in the current distribution. The multilingual collections represent approximately 160,000 items in total, with the Chinese language collection (incorporating both Mandarin and Cantonese content) containing almost two-thirds of this number:

| <b>Language</b> | <b>Holdings</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Mother Tongue Speakers<br/>in City of Vancouver</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Items per Mother<br/>Tongue Speaker</b> |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------|--|----------|--|
| Chinese         | 95,648          | 47%      | 133,810  | 54%      | 0.71                                       |
| Spanish         | 10,457          | 5%       | 12,010   | 5%       | 0.87                                       |
| Japanese        | 8,752           | 4%       | 7,005  | 3%       | 1.25                                       |
| Korean          | 8,635           | 4%       | 7,810  | 3%       | 1.11                                       |
| Vietnamese      | 7,577           | 4%       | 10,620   | 4%       | 0.71                                       |
| Tagalog         | 5,347           | 3%       | 19,435   | 8%       | 0.28                                       |
| German          | 4,739           | 2%       | 6,075  | 2%       | 0.78                                       |
| Italian         | 3,674           | 2%       | 4,740  | 2%       | 0.78                                       |
| Russian         | 3,500           | 2%       | 4,450  | 2%       | 0.79                                       |
| Persian         | 3,299           | 2%       | 7,670  | 3%       | 0.43                                       |
| Hindi           | 2,646           | 1%       | 3,680  | 1%       | 0.72                                       |
| Punjabi         | 2,606           | 1%       | 13,385   | 5%       | 0.19                                       |
| Polish          | 1,995           | 1%       | 2,720  | 1%       | 0.73                                       |
| Portugese       | 1,416           | 1%       | 4,700  | 2%       | 0.3  |
| Arabic          | 986             | 0%       | 2,485  | 1%       | 0.4  |
| <b>Totals</b>   | <b>161,277</b>  |          | <b>240,595</b>   |          |  |

*Sources: 2016 census data; 2017 circulation reports*

The circulation of multilingual materials has been declining in recent years, with a drop of 6% in 2016 and 3.6% in 2017. Languages with declining use include Chinese, German, Hindi, Spanish, Punjabi and Vietnamese. The drop in circulation is largely driven by falling use of audiovisual formats and print magazines, especially in Chinese, as patrons switch to online subscription services that are not licensed for library purchase. In comparison, print books in most languages saw overall increases in use in 2017. Staff attribute this increase to changes in buying to focus on popular material, and the cataloguing of a wider range of Chinese material.

In 2017 the Collections & Technical Services department conducted a thorough review of the performance of multilingual holdings at VPL, with recommendations to improve the circulation of underperforming areas of the collection. In addition, staff undertook a survey on literacy rates and reading habits in the nations whose languages we collect in order to better understand how Vancouver residents who speak these languages may use our collections and materials.

In addition to its multilingual collections, VPL offers programming in Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Spanish, German, and Tagalog. This includes multilingual versions of some of our most popular programs for children and adults. In 2017, over 150 program sessions were offered in languages other than English.

## **DISCUSSION**

Our current approach to multilingual collections positions these collections in neighbourhoods where particular demographics are represented, and also maintains a collection in each language at the Central Library. This leaves some locations with an inadequate amount of material for browsing. Collection size is also limited by the fact that in many of the languages we collect, certain formats or genres are difficult to purchase in Canada or cannot be licensed by libraries.

Staff recommend that VPL implement a new approach to the development and deployment of multilingual collections that improves the visibility and circulation of these materials, focusing on the consolidation of language materials in branch locations where they perform well to create deeper, richer collections that better serve the needs and interests of patrons.

There are a number of locations where census data supports having a language collection, but where the collections are not well-used. Our research indicates that reasons for this may include prevalence of English as an additional or preferred reading language, or low literacy rates in the country of origin. Staff recommend a greater reliance on use data and a deeper understanding of literacy and language trends, both to determine where collections are located and what formats should be contained within a specific language collection.

These changes will result in some branches having a large collection in a single non-English language rather than several small collections in multiple languages. The Central Library will no longer hold collections in all the languages available at VPL; however, patrons will be able to use holds to obtain material at their preferred location. Staff will refer to usage trends and literacy profiles to inform the composition of collections.

Using this destination branch approach will offer the opportunity to establish complementary programming and staffing if resources allow in the future.

## **Risks**

Anecdotally, staff report that patrons are prepared to travel to branches that may not be the most conveniently located for them if that branch offers services and collections in their preferred language. Nonetheless, there is a risk that by consolidating a language collection at a destination branch some community members will no longer have easy access to materials in their preferred language.

When staff propose the removal of an underperforming collection from a branch, they will survey users to explore the best options for meeting their needs and plan for appropriate communication to direct patrons to the new location or assist them with placing holds. Some patrons are likely to voice concerns about losing access at their preferred location, and staff will prepare messaging to respond to these concerns in advance.

### **Next steps**

Staff have identified Kensington as a potential destination branch for Vietnamese collections and South Hill as a potential destination branch for Punjabi collections. Staff will commence surveys and communication to patrons to prepare for this change.

### **Evaluation**

An evaluation process will take place after six months and one year, examining circulation data and patron feedback.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Staffing and signage costs associated with this recommendation will be funded from the operating budget.

### **FINAL REMARKS**

Multilingual collections, along with other multilingual services, are critical to fulfilling VPL's mission to respect and reflect communities of various cultural, ethnic, religious and philosophical backgrounds. While we collect content in a robust number of languages, our current approach to the distribution of these collections means that materials are spread thinly across our large system and the collections are not serving patrons' needs as effectively as they could. A new approach which focuses on building deeper, richer collections in specific locations is likely to serve our patrons better, increase the use of these materials, and build a foundation for additional consolidation of multilingual services in appropriate neighbourhoods.

## Appendix 1: Multilingual collections by VPL location

|                           | Arabic | Chinese      | French          | German       | Hindi | Italian | Japanese | Korean | Persian/ Farsi | Polish | Portuguese | Punjabi | Russian | Spanish         | Tagalog | Vietnamese       |
|---------------------------|--------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-------|---------|----------|--------|----------------|--------|------------|---------|---------|-----------------|---------|------------------|
| Central                   | ✓      | ✓            | ✓               | ✓            | ✓     | ✓       | ✓        | ✓      | ✓              | ✓      | ✓          | ✓       | ✓       | ✓               | ✓       | ✓                |
| Britannia                 |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         | ✓               |         | ✓                |
| Carnegie                  |        | ✓            |                 |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Champlain                 |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Collingwood               |        | ✓            | ✓<br>(children) |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Dunbar                    |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Firehall                  |        | ✓<br>(adult) | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Fraserview                |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            | ✓       |         |                 |         | ✓                |
| Hastings                  |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       | ✓       |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Joe Fortes                |        | ✓            | ✓               | ✓<br>(adult) |       |         |          |        | ✓<br>(adult)   |        |            |         |         | ✓<br>(adult)    |         |                  |
| Kensington                |        | ✓            | ✓               |              | ✓     |         |          |        |                |        |            | ✓       |         | ✓               | ✓       | ✓                |
| Kerrisdale                |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Kitsilano                 |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Marpole                   |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         |                 |         |                  |
| Mount Pleasant            |        | ✓            | ✓               |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         | ✓<br>(children) |         | ✓<br>(magazines) |
| néca?mat ct<br>Strathcona |        | ✓            | ✓<br>(children) |              |       |         |          |        |                |        |            |         |         | ✓               |         | ✓                |

[illegible]

Appendix 2: Multilingual Circulation 2014 – 2017

