



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: February 15, 2017
Author: Sandra Singh, Chief Librarian
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TO: Library Board
FROM: Sandra Singh, Chief Librarian
SUBJECT: Political Use of Library Space Policy

SUMMARY

This report recommends a new Board Policy to provide guidance to staff with regards to requests to use VPL space in support of political party activities.

PURPOSE

This report is for decision.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board approve the proposed Political Use of Library Space Policy.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee reviewed the proposed policy and engaged in extensive discussion related to the distribution of materials. After consideration, the Committee recommended some clarification to the section that clarifies materials accepted for display need to focus on providing information about the candidate. There were some further minor edits suggested to clarify two points – one related to media advisories and one related to the proposed limitation on participation in library events during election periods. The Committee voted to recommend the Board approve the policy as amended. The attached proposed policy includes the changes required by the Committee.

POLICY

There are several related policies: [Public Space Policy](#), [Meeting Room and Facilities Policy](#), [Endorsement Policy](#), and [Code of Conduct](#).

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

The public library plays a critical role in supporting an informed and engaged democracy by ensuring everyone has access to the information and resources they need to participate actively in democracy and to make informed decisions. In order to support this role, it is critical that public libraries are and are seen to be politically neutral in terms of support or lack of support for political parties. A Policy that provides clarity and guidance to the public and staff will ensure that the library's role and engagement with political parties in general and during elections specifically is well-understood.

BACKGROUND

Over the last two elections, a number of situations arose that highlighted the need for better clarity for library staff with regard to responding to requests for participation and/or access to library space. For example, we received a number of requests to use library branches or spaces for policy announcements by campaigning parties both just prior to the writ and within the election campaign period and we also had staff inviting elected officials to public events during election periods because it was not well understood that this was not appropriate.

DISCUSSION

The attached draft policy seeks to provide guidance to staff and political parties and candidates as to the role that the library plays within our democratic system and proposes an approach for consideration by the Board.

The Canada Elections Act 81.1(1)(2) does provide some guidance to open and free spaces during Federal elections:

Campaigning in public places

- **81.1 (1)** *No person who is in control of a building, land, street or any other place, any part of which is open without charge to members of the public, whether on a continuous, periodic or occasional basis — including any commercial, business, cultural, historical, educational, religious, governmental, entertainment or recreational place — may prevent a candidate or his or her representative from campaigning in or on that part when it is open without charge to members of the public.*

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in respect of a place if campaigning in or on it would be incompatible with the function and purpose of the place or inconsistent with public safety.

Because people come to the public library to use library services and do not expect to be interrupted in their use of the library by people soliciting support for any cause and the library sees this as a significant disturbance to operations and service, the proposed draft policy recommends prohibiting campaigning in the service area of the library, but allows for limited campaigning in lobby areas (does not include vestibules).

Given the direction for Federal elections, the proposed policy builds in the same approach for Provincial and Municipal elections as the BC Elections Act and the Vancouver Charter do not contain specific reference to candidates rights to access space for campaigning.

The policy also suggests treatment of meeting room rentals by political parties between and during elections.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.

FINAL REMARKS

The Library's position as politically neutral is core to our work as a trusted public entity. The attached proposed policy seeks to provide clarity for political candidates and library staff as to the role of the library during elections and in relation to political parties.

Political Use of Library Space Policy - Draft

Context, Objective and Scope

a) Context

The public library is a foundational institution for informed and inclusive democracies and plays an important role in civic dialogue and debate, ensuring that everyone has access to the information and wide range of opinions on social and economic matters they need to make informed decisions. In playing this role, it is essential that the public library be viewed and experienced as neutral toward political parties at all times. This commitment to political neutrality does not preclude the library from taking positions on and issuing statements in support of core library values and in protection of Human, Charter, and other legislated rights.

As active and trusted public institutions, public libraries are often approached by politicians or political parties to use public library spaces or to have access to patrons. Such requests vary broadly and have included, for example, requests for permission to host press conferences or announcements, permission to leaflet in the library, or permission to leave campaign materials in the library during election periods.

Requests for use of public library space or access to public library patrons have the potential to impact a public library in several ways, including:

- Engagement of library financial and personnel resources
- Potential risks to or enhancement of the library's reputation
- Effect on the patron experience

b) Policy Objective

To provide guidance to staff in responding to requests from political parties or individual politicians seeking to use VPL space or to have access to VPL patrons in support of the political party's objectives or during an election period.

c) Scope

This policy applies to any requests for use of Library space, access to patrons, or participation in events that are related to a political party or during an election period.

"Election period" is broadly defined as the time during which parties, candidates, or supporters are seeking to promote their political platforms leading up to the writ or announcement or during the actual campaign period until the election itself.

Requests can come from anyone, including politicians, political staff, party volunteers, community organizations, and governments. Library use requests covered by this policy include, but are not limited to, requests related to the following activities:

- Use of library space to hold an announcement or press conference
- Display or distribution of campaign materials in the library
- Interaction with patrons inside or outside of the library
- Participation in events at the library
- Posting of candidate information on the library website

Policy Statements

1. The Library does not endorse political parties or candidates.

2. Use of Library space to hold an announcement or press conference

As a general guideline, public library service spaces are not to be used by political candidates or parties to make policy announcements or hold press conferences. While such events may be space rentals, there is a high risk that the library will be seen to be endorsing the candidate or political party.

Exceptions may be made on occasion for rentals of meeting rooms provided that there are no identifying library logos or features in the meeting room, there is no attempt to engage library users in the event, and the event would not disrupt library services or operations. In such cases, the market rental rate will apply. Additional security charges may apply. The renter's media advisory must clearly state that the siting of the announcement or press event at the library does not signify endorsement by VPL.

During the election period, no press conferences or announcements by political parties or candidates will be permitted in the library, library meeting rooms, or on library grounds.

3. Participation in library events

The library supports democratic dialogue and is welcoming of candidate participation in all candidates meetings to discuss issues of importance to the community. These all candidates meetings may be organized by the library or sited at the library by library partner or renting organizations.

During a government's term, Councillors, MLAs, and MPs are often invited to library events as active participants or to bring greetings from the government. The library welcomes and appreciates this participation from government elected officials. Once a writ is dropped – or the equivalent signal in provincial or municipal elections – no elected official or candidate from that level of government will be invited to speak or present at library events, with the exception of all candidates meetings, until after the election has concluded.

4. Distribution of campaign materials

The Library will create a web resource that links visitors to information about local candidates in Local, Provincial, and Federal elections.

Some library branches may have the space to display materials about the candidates. Discretion as to availability of space is assigned to the Branch Head, with the provision that the library will not display the materials of only one party. The display must include materials from at least two parties at all times and must include a list of all candidates from that riding with links to their websites if available, with an invitation to candidates to display their material.

5. Active campaigning in the library

The library does not permit solicitation of any kind in its service areas as it interrupts their use of the space and library resources.

During elections, candidates are welcome to interact with patrons outside of the library's exterior doors and – in non-co-located facilities – in an atrium or lobby area, excluding vestibules, outside of library security gates – provided such interaction does not impede access to the library, does not unduly disrupt people entering or exiting the library, and does not impact safe entrance or exit to the library. No furniture may be set-up in support of this activity.

Procedures

Requests for the library to hold an all candidates meeting may be directed to the Programming and Learning Department or to a local Branch Head.

Requests to physically display campaign materials may be directed to the Branch Head of the branch or to the Manager of Information Services in the case of Central Library.

Requests to leaflet or distribute campaign materials in person must be presented to the Director of Neighbourhood and Youth Services or the Director of Library Experience.

Requests to rent a library meeting room for the purposes of a campaign announcement must be presented to the Chief Librarian or delegate.

Policy Administration Roles and Responsibilities

- CRPD Committee - Reviews policy and recommends changes to the Board as necessary.
- Board - Approves policy and revision to the policy.
- Management and Supervisory Staff - Responsible for administration and implementation of this policy, and responsible for ensuring that staff review the policy and are trained to ensure ongoing understanding in administering the policy within the scope of their duties.
- Staff - Must fully comply with the policy within the scope of their duties.
- Volunteers - Must fully comply with the policy within the scope of their volunteer duties.

Approved by the Library Board:

Revised:

Related Policies

- Public Space Policy
- Meeting Rooms and Facilities Policy
- Endorsement Policy
- Code of Conduct