



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: February 20, 2020
Author: Julia Morrison, Director Corporate Services & Facilities
Polly Argo, Manager Events & Filming
VanDocs#: DOC/2020/049096
Meeting Date: February 26, 2020

TO: VPL Board
FROM: Rhonda Sherwood, Chair, Services, Finance, and Human Resources
Committee
SUBJECT: **VPL Public Facing Rentals**

SUMMARY

This report provides information on public facing meeting room and facilities rentals for background to a discussion of whether VPL should reconsider this service.

PURPOSE

This report is for information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the report be received for information.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee held a preliminary discussion with the purpose of identifying additional information the Board would need to reconsider the scope of space rental activity. They discussed whether the Library should continue to allow public facing rentals, given that these can include speakers or screenings that have a high probability of being confused with VPL programs, and/or have the potential to affect the reputation of the Library, and, if the library does choose to discontinue most public facing rentals, whether certain categories of rentals should be allowed to continue. The Committee identified a range of additional information that would be useful to receive from staff for the discussion at the Board, including further information about public and staff opinion, costs associated with event types relative to their revenue, related Library policy

such as the Public Space policy, the requirement not to discriminate on the basis of content, and interest in policies for rentals at other City facilities and local faith-based organizations. Staff will gather additional information and prepare a report including a recommendation for consideration by the Committee and Board.

POLICY

The updated [Public Meeting Rooms and Facilities Use](#) Policy was approved by the Board in September 2019, and introduced a Rental Pre-Screening and Risk Assessment procedure to identify whether events are likely to, or will, violate the Criminal Code or the BC Human Rights Code, or present a significant security risk to the Library.

The updated policy explicitly states that hate speech, as defined by law, is not permitted, and that VPL will not accept event bookings that are intended to promote or incite hate as defined by Canadian law.

VPL has two related policies, a [Public Space](#) policy approved in 2005 and revised June 28, 2006, and the [Political Use of Space](#) policy, approved February 22, 2017.

Other policy documents relevant to the discussion include the VPL [Diversity and Inclusion Statement](#) approved June 23, 2010, and the [Programming at VPL](#) policy, approved in 1986 and last revised June 20, 2018.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The content of event rentals can conflict with VPL's values and strategic initiatives, affecting VPL's reputation and leading to consequences for VPL's staff, reducing our ability to partner on VPL programs with community organizations, and impacting perceptions of VPL as a welcoming space for certain groups.

BACKGROUND

VPL's strategic plans over the past eight years have emphasized access and equity; this has resulted in extensive work by staff to build relationships with community groups and community members who have not always been represented in Library programming.

In order to achieve these goals, staff established related initiatives, including a Trans, Gender Variant and Two-Spirit Inclusion Strategy, Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, and activities to gather community stories in Story City for Canada 150+. These activities have been successful in creating many new partnerships that have increased the diversity of VPL's programs and established VPL as a welcoming space for many people who had not previously seen their voices reflected in our programs.

VPL is committed to fostering inclusion and reducing discrimination. A significant part of that is providing welcoming spaces, including for members of trans and gender non-binary communities, and promoting respectful communication. The Library's work with these communities has helped us to learn that additional measures are often needed to create a space that feels welcoming and inclusive for groups that have faced barriers to using the Library or felt excluded from library space in the past.

While meeting room rentals are not part of VPL's programming, it is often not clear that these events taking place at library locations are not organized or delivered by VPL. In the community, they are often perceived as under control of, and endorsed by, VPL.

DISCUSSION

In January 2020, the Board requested that staff prepare material for further discussion of offering public facing rentals in VPL facilities.

Needs Analysis

VPL depends on community partnerships to deliver many of the more than 2,500 adult programs that the Library offers annually that are supported by the Library's Programming & Learning department. These partnerships are critical to our ability to deliver adult programs, and these relationships can be affected by the content and activities during room rentals.

The majority of public facing rentals are unlikely to be confused with library programs, and include religious worship services, information sessions and graduations for schools, job fairs, information tables in the promenade, press conferences, and focus groups.

Other public rentals include public lectures and screenings, and workshops/seminars, which have a higher probability of confusion with library programs.

During the consultation process for VPL's 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, the public stated that free meeting spaces for community organizations and businesses are important, and stressed the importance of providing meeting space for those who may not be able to access paid services. When considering community needs, over 40% of the public felt it was extremely important for VPL to provide spaces for community use.

The City of Vancouver's Cultural Spaces consultation similarly found that affordable rental space is needed and what exists is in high demand. Removing the option for public facing rentals at VPL would reduce the amount of affordable space available, and could negatively affect cultural and non-profit organizations.

Some of this need could fit with VPL's strategic goals and be appropriate for VPL partnership programming, but other groups would be turned away.

In 2019, 1073 rooms were rented for events. Of these, 321 (approximately 30%) were rooms rented for events that were open to the public. These 321 events can be further broken down into the following categories and number of events:

	Number of Events in 2019	% of 2019 Public Facing Rentals	% of Total 2019 Rentals
Weekly and regular religious/spiritual services	152	47.4%	14.2%
Public lectures and screenings	79	24.6%	7.4%
Promotional/informational displays; job fairs	26	8.1%	2.4%
Professional associations/organizations	19	5.9%	1.8%
Government department or agencies, consulates, labour unions, Crown corporations	15	4.7%	1.4%
Conventions	10	3.1%	0.9%
Arts performances, openings and festivals	7	2.2%	0.7%
Meetings	5	1.6%	0.5%
Accredited educational institution orientations, info sessions, and graduations	5	1.6%	0.5%
Planning and development consultations	3	0.9%	0.3%
	321	100.0%	29.9%

VPL could consider discontinuing specific categories of events, while maintaining others. Some categories of events have the potential for significant impact on operations and service delivery.

As noted above, there are several categories of public rentals that are unlikely to be confused with VPL programs. These types of events typically require standard planning, routine set up, and predictable levels of staffing to oversee the event. There is normally no impact to VPL operations during these events, and they are able to be held within VPL operating hours. These events do not require specific, customized planning and coordination to ensure the safety and security of VPL staff, patrons and assets.

The events that fall into this category include: weekly and regular religious/spiritual services; promotional/informational displays and job fairs; professional associations/organizations; Government department or agencies, consulates, labour unions, Crown corporations; arts performances and festivals; accredited educational institution orientations, info sessions, and graduations; and planning and development consultations. In 2019 this group comprised 227 events, which represents approximately 71% of the total public events.

Conversely, the types of public rentals that do have the potential to be confused with VPL programs, and do have the potential to impact VPL operations are typically those that include speakers or screenings. These categories are: public lectures and screenings, meetings and conventions. In 2019 this group comprised 94 events, which was approximately 29% of the total public events (9% of total paid room rentals).

The planning and set up for these events has the potential to be very resource intensive, and can include the following types of operational considerations:

- When should the event be held, in relation to opening hours?
- Are there other rentals or programs booked to take place the same time, and what planning is required to accommodate both groups at the same time?
- If there are no other rentals or programs, do we need to “block off” the adjacent rooms so that no other groups can be booked during this time?
- Are there threats, protests or other security concerns that will require specific security planning and additional staffing?
- Do we need the Vancouver Police Department to be deployed during the event, or involved in the event planning?
- Are there concerns for staff safety and wellbeing, and what protocols need to be deployed to ensure their safety and security?
- Which internal VPL groups will be required to provide additional support to manage the event?

Recognizing that any decision to discontinue some categories of public facing rentals could negatively affect cultural and non-profit organizations, VPL would need to look for partnership opportunities, where appropriate, to mitigate the impact if this category of event rental were discontinued.

Non-Public Rentals

Public facing rentals are currently only allowed in the three meeting rooms on the lower level of Central Library, and in the open areas of the Promenade and North Plaza, and are not allowed within internal VPL space (beyond the entrance to the Central Library from the atrium).

In addition to public facing rentals, there are hundreds of private rentals, partnership events and VPL programs that take place in VPL meeting rooms throughout the year.

In 2019, VPL spaces were used to support the Women Deliver Satellite Sessions, in collaboration with the City of Vancouver, and staff worked with artists and the City of Vancouver to plan and install art exhibits including Adrift, the mural above the L2 elevators, and the banners in the Promenade.

Meeting spaces on Levels 8 and 9 became available for rental in Fall 2018. This has provided an additional 30 indoor and outdoor spaces for filming, private rentals, and VPL programs and exhibits. The information webpages for these rooms are currently being developed. They are not yet available on the VPL website, however the spaces are already popular. These spaces are not yet available for after-hours private rentals for galas and networking events, and this is planned as a future offering.

Background on Meeting Room/Event Staffing and Budget

All events are supported by the Library Square Conference Centre (LSCC) events and rentals staff team. The events team is self-funding, with the annual event rental revenue supporting the costs of the team.

For 2020, the budget for the LSCC team is a net profit of \$51,000. This is comprised of \$489,000 of rental income, offset by \$438,000 of expenditures (primarily salaries and benefits). In 2019, the LSCC made a net profit of \$90,000. The additional \$39,000 above the budgeted net profit was transferred to Library Reserves, and will be used to fund future purchases such as replacement equipment and furniture for rental spaces.

The core LSCC team is comprised of five full-time staff: the Manager and four Events Assistants. This core team is responsible for taking and managing bookings, working with clients to assess their needs and requirements, providing quotes for rentals, scheduling staff to assist with event setup and take-down, liaising with other VPL groups such as security, janitorial and building engineering, and being available for clients during events and filming.

Since it was approved in September 2019, this team has taken on the responsibility for implementing the Rental Pre-Screening and Risk Assessment procedure for public rentals, and gathering the initial information that is required to begin the assessment process. This team also supports VPL programming, managing the room booking database and working with Programming & Learning and Children's and Teen Services departments to facilitate event logistics for VPL programs.

In addition to this core team, VPL has a group of 10-15 trained auxiliary Event Service Assistants who are scheduled as needed for event set up and take-down. The auxiliary hours vary from week to week and event to event, and their costs are recovered from the rental clients. These auxiliary staff and the four Events Assistants are members of CUPE 391.

No additional core staff were brought on to support the additional meeting rooms on Level 8 and 9 when they opened in September 2018. Management is now reviewing the LSCC team size and structure, as they are operating beyond capacity with the addition of this new space, and they are unable to keep up with the meeting room requests in a timely manner.

If we continue with all of the current types of rentals, and with the increased activity from the additional rental spaces, we will require additional staffing to support the volume.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If the Board chooses to disallow or restrict public facing rentals, room rental revenue from this category of rentals will be reduced, however it is anticipated that this would be offset by additional private rental revenue from the Level 8 and 9 spaces that only recently became available to the public and are not yet being promoted.

FINAL REMARKS

Room rentals at Central Library provide a valuable community service. Many organizations seek to hold events or use meeting spaces at VPL as the Library offers some of the most affordable meeting rooms in downtown Vancouver. This also helps to establish VPL as a public space and community focal point. Inevitably, some rentals will continue to raise concerns that conflict with VPL values and affect certain communities if public facing rentals continue to be available.