



Vancouver Public Library

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MEMORANDUM

October 12, 2016

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FROM: Sandra Singh, Chief Librarian
Directors Group

TO: All Staff

SUBJECT: **BRANCH STAFFING MODEL - DIRECTORS GROUP DECISIONS**

SUMMARY

This memo presents the Directors Group's decisions following Western Management Consulting (WMC)'s review of Vancouver Public Library (VPL)'s branch staffing model and subsequent report.

CHIEF LIBRARIAN'S COMMENTS

As a responsible and accountable public service, we at VPL must always be reviewing our approaches: we need to be constantly looking at how work is changing, work that needs to be done, or work we anticipate needing to be done and creating new positions that meet those needs. Over the past 6 years, VPL has taken a proactive and courageous approach to reviewing, streamlining, and redefining our processes, work, and services. The multitude of large and small reviews have resulted in public service improvements, new work opportunities for staff, and the opportunity to pursue new roles for the library. Program assistants, Inspiration Lab Technicians, and the Accessible Services Coordinator are a few of the roles that have been created in recent years to respond to changing pressures and opportunities.

The Branch Staffing Review (2015-2016) presented us with an opportunity to benefit from the outside expertise and perspective of a management consultant who has worked with many similar organizations on organizational structure. As with the previous reviews, we are looking for the potential to improve public service and/or the potential to redeploy our attention and effort to support emerging strategic priorities or to address gaps and pressures.

I would like to thank the Branch Staffing Review Steering Committee, all of the staff who provided feedback during the worksite visits this past summer, and the Branch Staffing Model Working Group, the latter who reviewed all of the recommendations and staff feedback in order to bring recommendations to the Directors Group.

While the decisions have been made as to which recommendations we will be pursuing, modifying, or declining to implement, there is still a lot of work to be done to plan for implementation and then to eventually implement. One thing became very clear during the worksite visits: staff across the system have a lot of ideas of how some of these recommendations could work if approved. We are looking forward to forming the implementation teams so that we can start to take some of those ideas and put them into action.

Overview:

VPL will proceed with implementing the following WMC recommendations detailed in their report [\[link\]](#):

1. Extend the Supervisor responsibilities to cover operational oversight for all (non-Librarian) staff in the Branch (Library Assistants and Library Technicians), in all branches, *subject to funding source*. (7.2.2)
2. Reset the current reporting requirements and employee expectations to work in a specific branch or branches to a more flexible workplace in which employees expect assignments across multiple branches, either system-wide, or within a particular geographic region (7.3.4)
3. Review the requirements and staffing alternatives for technical support for patrons (7.3.5)
4. Reduce the number of individuals filling part-time positions in a branch through consolidation of hours (7.4.1)
5. Exercise flexibility in scheduling as determined by management (7.4.2)
6. Rebuild schedules and staffing to fully integrate evenings and Saturdays and Sundays into all branch staff schedules and the assigned classifications (7.4.3)
7. Redesign the staff replacement process to function efficiently (7.4.4)
8. Implement a minimized opening protocol based on current practice at Terry Salman and Mount Pleasant branches (7.4.5)
9. Reassess the compressed work week impact on public service capacity and operational efficiency (7.4.6)
10. Review and redesign administrative process and systems such as scheduling to optimize branch efficiency (7.5.1)
11. Review community engagement processes and activities to optimize effort and to enable branches to deliver on organizational goals (7.6.1)

VPL will proceed with the following actions based on WMC recommendations but with modifications from their original recommendations:

1. Create two public service positions in branches replacing the current Shelver, Library Assistant II and Library Technician II roles. *Maintain the Shelver role at the largest branches (and Central Library)* (based on 7.3.2 and 7.3.3)
2. Investigate and review Maintenance and IT Services to better serve branch requirements. (based on 7.5.2, not including Service Level Agreements or other Centrally-based services at this time)

VPL will not implement the following recommendations:

1. Have Branch Heads oversee two branches (7.2.1)
2. Change the branch head job description requirement for an MLIS degree to an “optional or preferred” qualification and add a requirement for general business management credentials (e.g. Business administration) or equivalent experience (7.3.1).

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The Branch Staffing Model Review is the latest in a series of operational reviews that the Library has undertaken since 2012 to adapt its service models to respond to societal and public service changes and pressures, including: rapid technological development and broad-based societal adoption of technology, increased sophistication of the digital community and economy, increasingly divergent expectations for in-person and digital services, changes in the publishing industry, pressures on and competition from allied sectors and institutions, significant demographic change, and global economic instability.

BACKGROUND

In late June, the Library received Western Management Consulting’s (WMC) report on the Branch Staffing Model Review which was subsequently shared with staff, the Union, and the Library Board. The report outlines 16 recommendations for consideration. In July and August, members from the steering committee visited all staff units and branches to hear feedback and comments from staff regarding the recommendations. Subsequently, the Branch Staffing Model Working Group (Director, Neighbourhood and Youth Services; Director, Collections and Technology; Senior Manager, Services for Children & Teens; and Neighbourhood Services Managers) met to review the recommendations, analyze the staff comments, and formulate recommendations for the Directors Group.

The Branch Staffing Model Working Group used the following criteria to assess the WMC recommendations:

- Patron experience
- Core services
- VPL values
- Employee enablement

Directors discussed the recommendations in September.

DISCUSSION

The Directors considered 16 recommendations in the WMC Branch Staffing Model Review report and the recommendations received from the Branch Staffing Model Working Group. They did not discuss the foundational recommendation “Driven by the strategic plan, establish specific service priority goals and objectives and then configure the staffing to succeed,” as this is part of the VPL’s regular operational planning processes. The Directors and the Working Group considered the recommendations using the following criteria: patron experience, core services, library values, and employee enablement, as well as staff comments received in the unit visits. The analysis below includes select

illustrative benefits and factors to consider in implementation planning and considers application at Central Library. These examples are not intended to be comprehensive.

As with all significant changes implemented at VPL, we will consider options to achieve outcomes in a manner that has the least impact on employees. As with the previous reviews, management will also share information with the Union and work with the Union to try to address concerns as reasonably possible while we plan implementation.

VPL will proceed with implementing the following recommendations:

1. Extend the Supervisor responsibilities to cover operational oversight for all (non-Librarian) staff in the Branch (Library Assistants and Library Technicians) *subject to funding source* (WMC 7.2.2)

Some supervisors expressed that they are already overseeing the bulk of the operational responsibilities so this would not be a material difference for them. VPL branch supervisors could be more efficient and effective if they were responsible for broader branch operations and assigned minimal operational tasks. VPL will not include Central Library in implementation at this time.

Benefits:

- Branch heads have more time to focus on strategic priorities and community engagement with less time required to oversee day to day operations.
- Efficiency gained from a single supervisor for branch operations.
- Supervisors have greater ability to resolve problems.
- Fewer direct reports for branch heads.

Factors to consider:

- Resources to facilitate this change (e.g. scheduling software) so supervisors have more time to support staff.
- Increased costs if positions are reclassified.
- Required qualifications.
- Training.

2. Reset the current reporting requirements and employee expectations to work in a specific branch or branches to a more flexible workplace in which employees expect assignments across multiple branches, either system-wide, or within a particular geographic region. (WMC 7.3.4)

This recommendation was broadly understood by staff and most noted that it is working effectively for children's and teen librarians and community librarians. This will allow VPL to dynamically redeploy staff as needed, broaden staff's experience, and lead to continuous improvement by sharing practices across branches. Posted part-time positions could straddle more than one branch, while positions requiring specialized skills, for example languages or a digital specialist, could work across a neighbourhood or branches as a whole. The implementation will include Central Library staff. Timing will be discussed during implementation planning.

Benefits:

- Specialist services could be created to provide services in multiple locations to serve the needs of many communities. For example, a technical specialist could be available to the public on Wednesdays in one branch, on Thursdays in another, etc. or a Vietnamese speaker could be available in a branch/community for programming and information services on particular days.
- Employees will gain stability and employee engagement is likely to increase when part-time hours in more than one branch are consolidated into a single posted part-time position.

Factors to consider:

- Defining the number of branches that a single position could work at.
- Staff who work in multiple locations may feel less part of a branch team, and be less able to participate in staff meetings.
- Coaching and performance development for staff who work in multiple locations may be more challenging for supervisors.
- Demand for services may not be spread throughout the week. For example, many branches in a neighbourhood may want a specialist full time staff person on a Saturday.
- Whether overall cost savings allow for the creation of new specialist positions.

3. Review the requirements and staffing alternatives for technical support for patrons (WMC 7.3.5)

This recommendation was supported and understood by staff, and they shared ideas about how it could be implemented during the unit visits. Staff at various classifications highlighted the amount of time that they spend troubleshooting challenges patrons have with technology, and noted that there is uncertainty and overlapping roles. There is some confusion about what staff should assist patrons with, and what to do when a patron's issue is beyond an individual staff member's expertise. Directors agreed that VPL will proceed with a review and establish a recommended approach that will be applied system-wide.

Benefits:

- Better service for patrons.
- If specialist positions are created, enhanced opportunities for staff with particular expertise.
- Increased efficiency by having fewer staff to train.
- Specialists could train and mentor other staff.
- Clearer understanding of the level of on-demand technical support that the library provides to patrons.
- Clearer understanding of the role of various staff classifications in providing technical support.

Factors to Consider:

- Qualifications and training needed.
- Supervisors will need to ensure that non-specialist staff have a clear understanding of their role and meet expectations.
- How to deploy specialist staff (e.g. positions across multiple branches, positions based at Central).
- If specialist approach is used: inability to offer consistent support when specialist is not on site.
- Insufficient cost savings to create new positions.

4. Reduce the number of individuals filling part-time positions in a branch through consolidation of hours (WMC 7.4.1)

This recommendation was broadly understood by staff and the vast majority agreed with its intent, although some noted that some staff prefer to work less than 20 hours per week or prefer more flexible schedules. Posted part-time positions that straddle more than one branch may also include the Central Library as a work location.

Benefits:

- Employees gain stability and employee engagement would likely increase when part-time hours are consolidated into a single posted part-time position.
- More effective coaching and performance development is possible.
- Reduced time required for scheduling, training, and performance development when VPL has fewer employees with small numbers of hours.
- Creating more posted part-time positions addresses concerns about precarious employment
- Employees with 20 hours or more receive benefits.

Factors to consider:

- Better communication will be necessary if we implement positions across branches.
- The number of branches that comprise a single position
- Consolidating existing part-time hours into posted part-time positions may increase the cost of benefits paid by VPL as an employer.
- Training costs will be lower with fewer staff as a result of consolidated hours.

5. Exercise flexibility in scheduling as determined by management (WMC 7.4.2)

Staff reaction to this recommendation is mixed. Staff and managers noted that this is already the practice at some locations, particularly adjusting schedules to attend community events. Increasing flexibility of scheduling would enable supervisors to position staff when they are most needed. Part-time staff schedules could be fixed in advance based on operational needs and availability submitted by staff. This will include Central Library staff. Timing will be discussed during implementation planning.

Benefits:

- Customer service improvements when schedules are adjusted to meet strategic priorities, short-term projects and seasonal variations.
- Schedules can be matched to branch operational needs.
- Staff could be assigned a regular number of weekly hours without fixed shifts (e.g. 20 hours a week) providing a more stable option than our current auxiliary model.

Factors to consider:

- Potential for centralized scheduling and more standardized schedules.
- If scheduling software is purchased, cost of software and training.
- If scheduling software is not purchased, supervisor time to draft schedules.

6. Rebuild schedules and staffing to fully integrate evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays into all branch staff schedules and the assigned classifications. (WMC 7.4.3)

Staff broadly support the principle of this recommendation and understand that VPL is a seven day operation. Weekend and evening staff report feeling less connected to branch operations and their team. Some staff expressed concerns about the impact for work-life balance. Staff raised issues about implementation of Sunday scheduling, including collective agreement provisions on working Sundays, religious considerations, and the shorter Sunday opening hours in most branches. (Note - Terry Salman and Mount Pleasant branches are open from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm on Sundays, as will the new néca?mat ct Strathcona Branch; Carnegie is open from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm; all other branches are open from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm). This will include Central Library staff. Timing will be discussed during implementation planning.

Benefits:

- Supervisors would be available to coach and support weekend and evening staff.
- More consistent public service on weekends and evenings.
- If fewer part-time staff are required on evenings and weekends, savings would be available to advance other service priorities.

Factors to consider:

- Sunday opening hours (1:00 – 5:00 at most branches) make it impractical to schedule full time staff on that day.
- Collective agreement provisions.

7. Redesign the staff replacement process to function efficiently (WMC 7.4.4)

This recommendation envisages a new process that ensures qualified replacement staff are ready and available for work, potentially by creating a pool of qualified staff deployed as needed, as well as considering other possibilities. The current process is time-consuming and ineffective. Supervisors and staff agreed with the need for change in this area. Where feasible, the new process will be applied at Central as well.

Benefits:

- Public service is maintained when staff are away.
- Supervisors would spend less time finding replacement staff.

Factors to consider:

- Need for replacement staff will likely be concentrated on specific days, particularly weekends.
- Delay in deploying staff to required location.
- Scheduling Software could assist with implementation
- If scheduling software is not purchased, high demand on supervisor time continues to schedule and deploy staff.

8. Determine and implement a minimized opening protocol based on current practice at TSN and MPL (WMC 7.4.5)

In general, staff were supportive of this option. Some staff commented that the time before opening is good for staff meetings and accomplishing administrative tasks. Only a small number of tasks are required before opening. Some staff commented that both Terry Salman and Mount Pleasant branches have automated materials handling and this may mean other branches will need more time. (Note: Britannia also opens in 30 minutes on all days of the week except one, and all 1pm to 5pm Sunday open branches open in 20 minutes). VPL will consider a similar model for Central Library during implementation planning.

Benefits:

- This could provide an opportunity to extend opening hours.
- Staff schedules could be better aligned with public service hours.

Factors to consider:

- Whether to adjust staff schedules (i.e. start later) or adjust branch opening hours (i.e. open earlier).
- Ensuring that staff meetings and administrative tasks fit into the work day.

9. Reassess the compressed work week impact on public service capacity and operational efficiency (WMC 7.4.6)

In general staff were not supportive of this recommendation. Although many understood the consultants' finding that the compressed work week adds complexity to scheduling and increases costs, they emphasized the benefit of work-life balance that the compressed work week provides. This assessment will include all units at VPL.

Benefits:

- Savings could be used to advance other service priorities.
- Less time spent on scheduling

Factors to consider:

- The assessment will need to include both the cost of replacement time and employee engagement as factors.

10. Review and redesign administrative process and systems such as scheduling to optimize branch efficiency (WMC 7.5.1)

Scheduling is currently a time-consuming manual task. It is difficult to extract data to assist in decision making and process improvement. Staff agreed with the reasons for this recommendation. Many offered suggestions for changes that would improve efficiency. VPL will include all work units in implementation.

Benefits:

- Increased efficiency, allowing Branch Heads and Supervisors more time to focus on higher priority activities to support enhanced public services.
- Improved access to consolidated, system-wide data.
- Lower potential for human error.

Factors to consider:

- Cost to implement an automated time entry system, scheduling system, analytics tools, and automated replacement callout tools, and the associated staff time savings for each feature.
- Availability of a compatible and affordable automated solution which will address all desired features.
- Scheduling software being considered by other City departments

11. Review community engagement processes and activities to optimize effort and to enable branches to deliver on organizational goals. (WMC 7.6.1)

Community engagement is a critical component of VPL's approach to providing public library services. Ongoing review and training are required to ensure that staff can learn and share best practices. Some staff noted that allocating resources and staff time to community engagement can be difficult or that expectations are not clear. Other staff thought that community engagement was well understood. VPL expects to include Central Library staff in this review. Timing will be discussed during implementation planning.

Benefits:

- Increased understanding of VPL's approach to community engagement, and of how to incorporate community engagement into service delivery.
- Increased confidence and comfort with community engagement practices.

Implementation considerations:

- Whether existing community engagement training needs to be updated.
- Consider use of targets (e.g. a certain percentage of time spent on community engagement) to set expectations and ensure accountability.
- Cost of training

In addition to the 11 approved recommendations above, VPL will proceed with implementing the following actions which are based on WMC recommendations but with modifications:

- 1. Create two non-librarian public service positions in branches.**
In smaller branches these positions will replace the current Shelver, Library Assistant II and Library Technician II roles. (Based on 7.3.2 and 7.3.3).
In larger branches and in Central, have the two positions and a shelver role.

Staff recognized the value of reducing hand off of patrons from one staff member to another, and noted that this hand off occurs less frequently at locations with one service desk rather than separate information and circulation desks. Please note there will continue to be Children's and Teen Services Librarians and Community Librarians in branches.

At smaller branches, VPL will establish two public service classifications, instead of three roles (Shelver, Library Assistant II, and Library Technician). At these locations, the entry-level classification would be responsible for shelving, circulation, materials handling and basic information service. The next level classification would be responsible for information services, programming, and other tasks including community work. This classification would also cover circulation functions as needed. The Shelver role would likely continue at some larger branches and Central Library, based on activity level. It will be more fully considered during implementation planning.

Benefits:

- All branch positions are public service focussed.
- Improved customer service with reduced number of hand offs.
- Staff can use a broader range of skills with increased flexibility for task assignment at the entry level role.
- Provides greater flexibility for branch operations (e.g. entry level role can work more than 4 hours per day and 20 hours per week).
- May reduce the number of staff required at one time if all staff support circulation services.

Factors to consider:

- Required qualifications for each position.
- Process for filling new or changed roles.
- Implications at Central Library.
- Costs for staffing changes.

- 2. Investigate, review and upgrade Maintenance and IT Services to better serve branch requirements. (7.5.2)**

This recommendation was understood and supported by staff. There were some questions about what Service Level Agreements involve and whether they would bring real benefits. There are currently insufficient resources in maintenance staffing to adequately address the demand at branches, and special projects can bump routine maintenance and facilities improvements. Communication and task

management can be an issue for maintenance and Systems requests. VPL will review and upgrade Maintenance and IT services and consider how to ensure service needs are met within the process. Branches are the priority for this recommendation.

Benefits:

- Improved public service.
- Improved response time for requests.
- More attractive branches.
- Improved communication and clearer idea of timeframe for completion of project.
- Reduced branch staff time required to follow up on outstanding projects.

Factors to consider:

- Identifying the roles that will best meet the needs of branches will be necessary.
- Budget to increase staffing would need to be identified.
- Software for managing tasks and purchase requests may need to be included in the assessment.

VPL will not proceed with the following recommendations:

1. Have Branch Heads oversee two branches. (WMC 7.2.1)

Staff were uncertain about the implications of this recommendation and identified concerns about including all the branches, specifically the larger branches. Given existing roles and staffing levels, modelling of new scenarios did not demonstrate that this change would have a significant financial or public service benefit, and the cost, time and impact to implement would be significant. While the Directors agree that branch heads' work should focus on strategic leadership and management, it is expected that the implementation of other recommendations (e.g. expanding the Supervisors' responsibilities and changing the staffing model) will facilitate this. This decision may be revisited once other changes have been implemented.

2. Change the branch head job description requirement for an MLIS degree to an "optional or preferred" qualification and add a requirement for general business management credentials (e.g. Business administration) or equivalent experience. (WMC 7.3.1)

Staff were concerned about this recommendation and what it meant for the future role of librarians at VPL. They were concerned about requiring business experience, and not requiring library qualifications. Staff shared ideas about alternative approaches, such as training, to increase business skills where they are required. The consultants' noted that branch operations could be improved by having staff with business management skills, and that increased innovation can come from having a mix of staff from a variety of professions. Directors agreed with the need for business skills but also place a priority on the MLIS. VPL will consider alternate methods to increase branch heads' business management skills, including

training and on the job experience, and will continue to consider positions where professional qualifications other than the MLIS would benefit the Library.

NEXT STEPS

Initial implementation planning meetings are scheduled for the last two weeks of October and implementation planning is expected to take the rest of the year. Staff will be engaged as necessary.

Implementation of approved recommendations will begin in 2017 and will be phased in. Plans and timelines will be shared with all staff as they are approved.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Operational impacts of the recommendations must be cost neutral to VPL, but it is hoped that some effort may be reassigned to support emerging strategic priorities.

FINAL REMARKS

Given the many changes in library service use and changing service delivery approaches, the Branch Staffing Model review comes at an opportune time. Recent changes resulting from the Children and Teen Services Review, the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan, the Information Services Review, and the Outreach Services Review have all impacted to some extent the work of staff in branches. Stepping back to take a holistic look at the branch staffing model ensures that the library is not missing any opportunities to improve service, capacity, or outcomes as it continues to evolve services in response to evolving community needs.