

**Rooted in the Community – Branching Out Into  
the Future: Union’s response to the Vancouver Public  
Library Branch Staffing Model Review**

**Report to the Vancouver Public Library Board**

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## **1) Union's goals and objectives in light of the Branch Staffing Model Review Report**

- Compensation/impacts on classification – staff must be compensated appropriately for the work they do.
- Hours of work – ensure staff have schedules that allow for a healthy work life balance
- Length of Service – that members are recognized for their dedication and commitment and the value their experience brings to new staff and existing staff and the organization as a whole. Especially in times of change, they can help facilitate this change through their institutional knowledge and experience.
- Health and Safety - That the work environment, whether physically or psychologically, promotes the wellbeing of staff.
- Training – that staff are aided in achieving and maintaining the competencies they require to have meaningful and fruitful work.
- Reduction in precarious work - that more stable and predictable work is made available, with all the associated benefits.
- Work satisfaction – that the Union facilitate however possible the creation of a staffing model that allows for an engaged, skilled and valued workforce, that continues to provide valuable service to the community.

## **2) Introduction**

The Union appreciates the ability to share this response to the Branch Staffing Model Review Report with the Library Board. This is an important document, which is directly tied to the strategic plans of the library and the goals and objectives of the Board.

When you are looking at this response, we hope you will use it as a complimentary lens when considering the recommendations that have come out of the Branch Staffing Model Review.

## **3) Initial reaction**

The Union can see possible positive outcomes from many of the recommendations, and possible negative ramifications for others. We recognize that implementation will be challenging in a number of levels. For instance, many of the recommendations will have a direct reliance on aspects of the Collective Agreement and impacts on classifications, as well as opportunity, promotion, and job security.

CUPE 391 is committed to facilitating changes that will have a positive effect on the ongoing relevancy and importance of the Vancouver Public Library. Vancouver Public Library staff are committed to the Library's strategic goals, as has been observed and identified by the consultants (p. 3; p.10).

The Union must also ensure the rights of our membership are protected. This is our role and obligation. Staff morale, well-being and job satisfaction are inextricably linked to effective service delivery and are critical to the optimal success of any new initiative and to the Library as a whole.

#### **4) CUPE 391**

CUPE 391 represents the frontline staff, that serve the public on a daily basis, whether through direct public service or support services. Our members carry out the programs, events and achievements reported to you in the Monthly Board Report. The positive feedback from the public about what they feel satisfied them most in the Branch Services Review is thanks to our members and the work that they do. Our staff rate as high as the Library overall in patron satisfaction (p. 24 – Branch Information Services Evaluation)

The last few years have brought about substantial changes in the way we deliver services. Staff have not only borne the changes, but also embraced them and brought them to life.

CUPE 391 is a partner in the future of the Library. Without us, there would be no library. We are committed to collaborating on building a strong and resilient organization together with the Board and the Library Management Team.

#### **5) Implementation**

We are very pleased that our Management Team has afforded the Union Executive and the membership an opportunity to review the Branch Staffing Model Report and weigh in before any recommendations have been decided upon. We believe that this kind of transparency and engagement are the critical first steps in the implementation of any impactful changes.

The recommendations in the Branch Staffing Model Report represent significant operational changes for all VPL staff and for the organization as a whole. In order to maximize the opportunities for successful implementation, full consideration must be given to all the implications and impacts potentially arising from the recommendations.

#### **6) Timeline**

The Union has some concerns about how quickly the Management team would like to make a decision on which recommendations to take forward. This report took almost a

year to complete; yet a decision has been promised for September. Given that we are almost in August, this leaves less than 2 months, not accounting for absences due to vacations and other impediments.

Given what's at stake, it would seem prudent to allow for more time to really understand what the possible impacts are, and how and whether they will truly benefit the realizations of the Library's Strategic Goals. In Project Management parlance, of the three desired outcomes, which are cheap, fast and good, you can only have two. To achieve an outcome that is good and affordable, it will take time.

The Report states that the current staffing model is "successful in enabling day-to-day delivery of core services for the communities across the city" (18). The Report also focuses on the need for greater flexibility in staffing and scheduling in the future. It is essential to the success of any new model that sufficient time and resources are allocated to assess where and why change is needed.

The apparent success of the Information Services Model in the Branches highlights the benefits of a slower implementation, as the change to the Central Branch ISV model was a hardship on both staff and the public. In addition, changes, like the Central Collections Reorganization, had it been done prior to the implementation, might have allowed for a smoother transition, as it would have facilitated the effectiveness of the model.

Change implementation at VPL will require time for staff training, for developing, implementing and assessing new policies and procedures, negotiating Letters of Understanding and changes to the Collective Agreement – these are just a few of the factors that require the participation of the Union. CUPE 391 looks forward to contributing positively to the evolutionary process at VPL that will provide improved and expanded library services for our communities and an improved working environment for our members, which respects our contributions and provides opportunities for growth, professional development and a career path at VPL.

## **7) Training, Education and Support**

The report singles out four priorities from VPL's 2013-2015 strategic plan, one of which is to "Nurture a strong organization. Along with this, the report identifies one of VPL's Foundational Elements, "Skilled and resilient staff who meet the changing community needs with confidence" (p. 10). Both of these support some of the most important components to the successful implementation of change, which is training, education and support.

It is understood that in the changing environment of the Libraries that competencies will shift and that new skills will be needed to face these new demands. This is identified in the report (p.20), along with recommendations that will have several implications in terms

of training and support. As the consultants have identified “Library staff are continuous and enthusiastic learners and VPL is committed to the development of staff and offers regular training and staff support” (p.20)

It is reassuring to hear that VPL is committed to staff development, however there is a lack of organized, strategic and consistent practical training. Training is typically ad hoc and will look different depending on the trainer. The library relies on the assumption that staff come to the job with the skills they require, leaving many staff behind, especially some long term and part-time and auxiliary staff. Although training is offered through City Learn (City of Vancouver), this is generalist and not Library specific. There is also no policy or process in place for the integration of continuing education into career development, and very little funding to support it. This will ultimately leave many staff behind, who will not be able to acquire the skills they need to move forward in the new model, such as Clerical Supervisors, should these position require a Library Technician Certificate, or Library Assistants, should this position be blended with Library Technicians.

VPL must look at how and what training they provide to staff. For instance, Ottawa Public Library’s “implementation of training to support staff through their transition” is identified as key to stronger team culture (p .40) As a matter of fact, OPL has a full-time position entitled Staff Development and Training Officer. With 750 staff, could VPL benefit from a similar dedicated position? During the implementation could there be a training team, utilizing the knowledge and skills already held by many staff, to deliver consistent and specialized training?

## **8) Cost**

VPL is committed to implementing change with as little impact on budget as possible. While fiscal responsibility to public funds is critical, change has associated costs. These costs must be seen as an investment in the future of the library.

Many of the recommendations will have budget implications, because they will have impacts on classifications for instance (added requirements to Branch Heads, Supervisors, Clericals, etc.). If there is a true commitment to training, that will also have associated costs.

The Union has a concern about the negative ramifications of implementing change “on the cheap”, which puts a lot of pressure on the staff and infrastructure, leaving them tapped out and having to adapt to half measures and imperfect solutions. Finding savings through streamlining is one method, but this takes time. We believe that a commitment to spending money, advocating for more budget or specific capital funding is imperative to the success of a new Branch Staff Model, and the inevitable changes the future will bring.

## **9) Looking to the past and present to inform the future**

The implications and success of many of the recommendations can be informed by past and current circumstances. For instance, the recommendation to blend the Library Assistants and Lib Tech positions is similar to the creation of the Information Assistant positions, which came out of clerical positions at Central where the incumbents were trained up to do reference questions at the desk. They were offered on the job training to develop their skills, and are now successfully integrated into Information services, Accessible Services, Children's and Teen Services, and Programming and Learning. We can also look at the current Supervisor position at Dunbar, which has a Librarian Technician requirement. It can be used to analyze whether adding this requirement has been significantly useful or whether it has stretched the position too far.

Another thing to consider are all the recent reviews (9 of them in the last 5 years) and their implementations, as outcomes have not been fully realized, and may have a direct impact on this current staffing model review. As well, looking at how these have been implemented, and doing an analysis of their successes and failures, will be of benefit in implementing any recommendations coming out of this report.

## **10) The Report**

WMC has produced a data-rich report that will be useful for analyzing many functions at VPL. It considers VPL branch operations from a business model and the recommendations fit a business model. L391 recognizes the value of that perspective and is supportive of measures that enhance VPL's operations as a fiscally responsible and responsive organization. However, that is only one aspect of VPL. VPL functions at its core as a cultural, social, recreational and educational resource for the communities it serves. The activities that support that broad function are not all captured in the data or the analysis found in the WMC report. Much of the most valued and most important work performed by VPL employees may not have readily measurable statistical outcomes.

In addition, discussion of the recommendations must be prefaced by a critical assessment of the methods by which they were developed and the reliability of the data upon which they are purportedly based. For instance, there are number of terms that serve to qualify discussions, evaluative statements, and recommendations that are not qualified themselves in the report. For instance, "non-value-added activities" is not defined nor explained. Who is it non-value-added for – the patrons, the staff, or management? How is "efficiency" understood? Does it mean more productivity in less time? Or less expenditure overall? Or does it mean when staff can answer a patron's question within an optimized time frame?

Another example is the reliance upon metrics that are quantitative in nature, such as the reference statistics, however the collection of this data is reliant on self-reporting, and is subject to human error, especially in the environment of the branch, where interactions shift in nature within the same transaction and distractions are constant, amongst other reasons. The level of rigour required for this data collection to be considered objective is not administered, and therefore must be subject to a large margin of error.

## **11) Analysis of the recommendations**

The Union has reviewed the recommendations and done an initial analysis of some of the implications. There are many, some of which are operational, but some which may have a direct impact on public experience and manifestation of goals and objectives. For instance:

- 7.2.1. The recommendation to twin the branches may further distance those staff (Branch Heads and Librarians) who administer the vision and planning piece from the staff who are realizing it on the front line and in the community.
- 7.3.1 The MLIS requirement is critical to seeing practical solutions in the context of libraries, and the accessible community specific services they offer as opposed to a business model, especially as Branch Heads have a responsibility for vision and planning. Requirements for additional skills should be seen as enhancements of this foundational knowledge base, not the other way around.
- 7.3.2. The recommendation to replace the Shelver position with an entry level position would provide improved job stability and employment opportunities for current Shelves (more hours, more pay, more training, so they have more advancement opportunities). This recommendation, if implemented, will help fulfill the City's commitment to the Living Wage, as this is obtained not just through the hourly wage but access to hours and benefits. Currently, employees in the Shelver classification are unable to achieve sustainable employment because of restrictions in shift lengths and number of hours per week. This results in job dissatisfaction and staff turnover.
- 7.3.4. The recommendation to move staff around multiple branches may discourage the development of ongoing relationships with members of the community. This is an aspect of community engagement, and also serves to inform the Library of the specific needs of their patrons. Keeping members within a couple of branches or the area may help offset this.
- 7.4.1. The recommendation to consolidate hours into regular positions would enable a more trained, able and nimble workforce, as they would receive regular and consistent experience and messaging, and encourage employee engagement

and buy-in. Greater job satisfaction would result as individual staff would have the time to follow through on special projects and allow greater participation in committee work and other initiatives, and it would encourage the development of relationships with the community.

These are some examples of where the Union sees implications for service. We will continue to communicate with the Library Management Team and the Board where appropriate on the possible implications of these recommendations as part of our advocacy for staff and the community.

## **12) Conclusion**

There are many benefits that could be realized for our members from these recommendations, and many we could support. The success of any plan or model depends on many factors, which includes consultation and negotiation with the Union. This should not be seen as an impediment or barrier, but an opportunity to work together in partnership to realize the institutions' strategic goals and secure a healthy future for the Library. This is as much the Union's objective as it is the VPL Management Team's and the Library Board's.

We encourage regular consultation and dialogue with staff and the Union, and a careful and thoughtful analysis of the implications of implementing these recommendations before going forward. We are ready and willing to participate in this process, and would like to encourage the VPL Management Team and the Board to have open dialogue with us at any time. We would be happy to provide clarification on our issues and expand on information and perspectives we have shared with you in this response.