

Building Inclusive Spaces

Vancouver Public Library's Trans, Gender Variant, and Two-Spirit Inclusion Initiative

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ABSTRACT Building inclusive spaces for all members of the community is part of Vancouver Public Library's long-standing commitment to inclusive and responsive library services. Beginning in 2016, VPL embarked on a project to review and update its services in order to be more inclusive for members of the Trans, Gender Variant, and Two-Spirit community. This session will explore the steps VPL undertook as it updated its programming, public services, facilities, and staff training to better meet the needs of these patrons.

The Vancouver Public Library has a long and proud history of serving their community. They have always worked closely with community groups to develop programs, displays, and activities that suit the needs and interests of the public. In 2015 the city of Vancouver (including the library) realized a need to better serve the transgender community. A study was undertaken to understand and undertake what was required for this purpose. The library initiated a strategic plan to stretch from 2017 to 2020 with the ultimate purpose of being a welcoming environment for all people.

The overall plan included thirty-seven recommended actions for VPL, which were divided into five activity areas: Programs and services; Human resources; Public spaces, facilities, and signage; Communications and data; Community consultation and public partnerships. Some of the details of the five activity areas are: Programs: inclusive programs and resources; Human resources: staff training on inclusive language, as well as being allies to the community—that is, informed, aware, and active. Public spaces included trans-inclusive

washrooms and safe spaces. In communications, the library staff was trained to be sensitive to inputting personal gender data and to speak with gender-neutral language. With already strong ties to the community, VPL was able to extend their involvement by building more community connections and develop open communication with a wider variety of groups.

With still another year remaining in the strategic plan, VPL continues to work toward making the library a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and educational environment that serves its community's needs. And although the initiative officially ends in 2020, the process, the training, the reassessment will be ongoing for many years. But the work that has been done has been much appreciated by an often-under-served group.

A research guide has been created on the library website detailing helpful books and resources, as well as some of the details of the initiative: <https://guides.vpl.ca/trans>