

Volunteer Report 2020



British Columbia
Library Trustees
Association

Public Library Trustees Volunteering and Making a Difference in BC's Communities: 2020 Snapshot

February 2021

In 2020 public library trustees gave approximately 64,000 hours to the governance of BC public libraries and then volunteered another approximately 48,000 hours in their communities across British Columbia. That is over 100,000 volunteer hours from BC public library trustees!

At the British Columbia Library Trustees Association (BCLTA) we have always known that our members volunteer beyond their public library boards and that they play a significant role in building resilient, inclusive, and compassionate communities across British Columbia. The BCLTA is pleased to share with the provincial government and with the broader community a snapshot of BC public library trustees as volunteers.

Background

Throughout 2020 trustees across the province tracked their volunteer hours as part of the “Public Library Trustees: Making a difference in BC’s communities one hour at a time” campaign.¹

The compiled results of this campaign provide a snapshot of trustees, from all types of communities and public libraries across the province, volunteering.² There are sixty-nine public library boards in BC and in any given year there are between 550 and 750 trustees. The 2020 survey results, along with the stories that trustees

1. This campaign was inspired by, and with approval borrowed from, the Local Government Management Association campaign “[100,000 Hours](#)”.

2. This report is informed by the self-reporting of trustees across BC through an online survey tool, emails, and focus-group discussions.

shared, reflect the commitment and generosity of trustees as volunteers and points to the impact of their volunteer work on community and provincial needs, goals, and aspirations.



Felicia Zhu is a trustee with the West Vancouver Memorial Library Board and in one of her many community volunteer roles she gave a talk on Remembrance Day to a group of newcomers from China. She recalls, "I helped them to understand its history, its significance and how Canadians celebrate this special day. The audience was very attentive and appreciative. I achieved a great sense of fulfillment and purpose."

Previous research has suggested that volunteerism, by bringing together persons from all walks of life to work on a common project or objective, contributes to "social cohesion" or "social capital" – for example, by increasing social trust, reciprocity and sense of belonging in communities (Martin Turcotte, Volunteering and charitable giving in Canada by Martin Turcotte Release date: January 30, 2015, Spotlight on Canadians, Results from the General Social Survey).

Community Volunteers

According to [Volunteer Canada](#), volunteering builds resilient, cohesive, and inclusive neighbourhoods and leads to a more just society, greater citizen engagement, informed public policy, and an enhanced democracy. Given the scope of their volunteering and the tremendous amount of skill, energy, and time that trustees are giving to their communities, the impact of their volunteering on their neighbourhoods and to broader society can be considered remarkable.



David Clark, Chair of the Cranbrook Public Library Board, and BCLTA Board Director also volunteers on three other non-profit boards where he has enjoyed working with a large variety of like-minded volunteers. To participate in the challenge of making his community better has been an unexpected joy for him. He has also been tremendously gratified to be there helping to carry the load in these difficult times alongside of such brilliant, steadfast co-volunteers.

In their volunteer role on public library boards, trustees are responsible for the strategic direction and oversight of public libraries. Key to this responsibility is a deep understanding of their community and the unique role of public libraries as critical social infrastructure.

The strategic directions set by volunteer boards for BC public libraries emphasize the importance of putting people first by supporting their learning, creativity, and information needs; by building strong relationships with local government, local First Nations, and with community organizations; and by being a fee-free public space where everyone can access information and be part of community discussions on significant topics such as lasting and meaningful reconciliation, inclusion and anti-racism, climate change, and other issues of global and local importance.

Volunteer trustees support public library leaders and staff to be responsive to pandemics, local environment crisis (forest fires, floods, severe weather), and to their communities changing social and economic needs through innovative programming, welcoming spaces, and up-to-date and trustworthy information services. It is noteworthy that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) in their November 2020 report [*Building Back Better Together*](#), in the section on “Strengthening Community Infrastructure”, name libraries as one of the key institutions for Canada’s post COVID recovery.



Rhonda Sherwood, Vancouver Public Library Trustee and BCLTA Director has volunteered for a number of organizations and causes including the BC SPCA, her professional association (FP Canada), and the Vancouver Women’s Advisory Committee. Rhonda describes volunteering as a meaningful and rewarding experience and is inspired by the people that she meets and their commitment to working together to make a difference in the community.



Daneve McAffer is the Board Chair of the Invermere Public Library and her other community passion is the local Hospice where she serves as President of the Board and trains hospice visitor volunteers. Daneve’s life vision comes from Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote, “To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded.” Daneve believes that the joy of volunteering, of having a purpose, of helping others succeed and is the gift you receive by sharing your time.

In 2020, in addition to the approximately 64,000 hours they gave to the governance of BC public libraries, trustees also volunteered another approximately 48,000 hours in BC communities. As volunteers, they have an impact by serving on community boards and committees, by advocating and informing policy, by mentoring and coaching others, and by developing and delivering services for a vast array of community based organizations that make a difference to the following:

- Arts and culture (galleries, museums, festivals, community dance, bands, and choirs, concerts, art cooperatives, instruction)
- Crisis lines, shelters, drop-in groups, and counselling
- Disability rights and inclusion (job training, sports, family and individual support, outings, drop-in centres)
- Environmental conservation and restoration
- First responders (first aid, fire-fighting, search and rescue)
- Food security (food banks, delivering meals, school meals, community meals, farmers markets, and community gardens)
- Harm-reduction services and safe injection sites
- Helping others (home care visits, driving people to appointments, meeting needs at places of worship, giving to those in need of home repairs, gardening, cooking, child and elder care)
- Hospitals (thrift stores, providing comfort to patients, fundraising)
- Palliative care and grief counselling
- Reconciliation, decolonization and Indigenization
- Social justice (LGTBQIA2S+ rights, anti-black racism, affordable housing, anti-poverty, disability rights, gender safety, animal rights, physical and cognitive rights and accessibility)
- Sports and recreation (coaching, instruction, trail and ice grooming, accessibility in sports)

Volunteering is a great way to contribute to your community and help others while sharing the talents and wisdom that you have gained throughout your life. (Province of British Columbia, [Volunteering](#)).

Next Steps

As well as frequently being under-acknowledged for their volunteer work on public library boards, BC public library trustees do not receive any monetary compensation, such as stipends or honorariums, for the time and effort that they give to the governance of BC public libraries. As we can see in this provincial snapshot, they are dedicated community volunteers and while this lack of monetary compensation may be understood as a positive or generous aspect of their commitment to public libraries and to their communities it has led to two different questions for the BCLTA.

1. Is this lack of compensation for public library board work a barrier to board inclusivity?
2. What other ways might trustees be supported, such as provincial recognition for their board work and dedicated funding for governance learning and development?

The BCLTA will be exploring these questions with the Public Library Services Branch, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and with others, such as the Association of BC Public Library Directors, in the public library community.

© 2021 British Columbia Library Trustees Association. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 License](#).