

NELSON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Future Needs Assessment



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On behalf of Selkirk College, I (we) acknowledge that we operate and serve learners on the unceded traditional territories of the Sinixt (Lakes), the Syilx (Okanagan), the Ktunaxa, and the Secwépemc (Shuswap) peoples.

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Background and Purpose

Public libraries are critical community infrastructure, and their role is changing. While images persist of libraries as quiet spaces for reading and study, the reality is that many libraries have evolved into community hubs where diverse patrons come to connect with others and access information in many forms. Libraries are also on the front lines of the broad social, environmental, cultural, and economic shifts that are influencing day-to-day life in Canadian communities, and they are expected to adjust services and operations accordingly.

The Nelson Public Library (NPL) is a treasured community asset that is feeling the strain of shifting and growing demands. It recognizes the need to continuously evolve services, facilities, and operational approaches, but wants to ground changes in evidence based on community priorities. Accordingly, NPL partnered with Selkirk Innovates to undertake a future needs assessment with a 30-year planning horizon. The objectives of the study were to:

- Summarize existing data and research on perceptions, trends and best practices that may indicate how service delivery expectations will change over the coming years
- Engage the community (focusing on non-library users and non-partners) to determine service needs/preferences and how NPL can support these groups
- Conduct an analysis of how community resources and institutional capacities are or are not aligned with future community needs
- Explore funding models that may allow the library to prepare financially for sustainable growth
- Generate a set of recommendations for next steps.

This report begins by setting the stage with the results of an environmental scan that summarizes current knowledge of local conditions and factors relevant to service delivery at NPL. Following this, we provide an overview of trends and best practices being witnessed in the broader library sector, highlighting each trend's relevance to the Nelson context. Next, we present the results from our community engagement, followed by a summary of the priority needs that emerged from a collective review of all forms of data. These needs are discussed in the context of the resource gaps that will influence NPL's ability to act on future priorities.

This report is accompanied by a one-page "Next Steps" document.



Summary of Current Context

Community Profile

The City of Nelson, along with surrounding rural areas (Regional District of Central Kootenay Areas E, F, and H, collectively the Nelson Public Library service area), was home to a population of approximately 24,000 people at the time of the 2021 Census of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023a). The population has been steadily increasing, with 5.2% growth since the 2016 Census, and projections indicating a 27% rise over the next twenty years (BC Stats, 2024). The average age in Nelson is 43, with surrounding rural areas being slightly older on average (45-48 years). As with many other parts of Canada, the population is gradually growing older, and that trend is expected to continue for at least the next two decades (BC Stats, 2024).

Households in the Nelson area tend to be slightly smaller than the national and provincial averages, with an average of 2.2 persons per household. Most households (56%) consist of only one family, and the majority of these are couple families. Roughly 20% of households are couple families with children, while 28% are couple families without children. Additionally, more than 30% of Nelson households in the NPL service area are one-person households (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

Regional income levels are lower than the provincial and national averages (Selkirk Innovates, 2024), with the average before-tax household income in Nelson being \$89,600 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Between 10% and 21% of the NPL service area population is considered low income, depending on the specific area, and the prevalence of low income is roughly equal among children, working-age adults, and seniors. Educational attainment is a strong indicator of income potential. Twenty eight percent of the NPL service area population aged 15 and older holds a Bachelor's degree or higher, while a similar proportion has a secondary school diploma as their highest level of education (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

From a cultural perspective, almost 94% of the City's population speaks English most often at home, but that figure is slowly shifting. Ninety-five percent of City residents were primarily English speakers in 2016 and, in 2011, it was 96%. The rural areas have a higher percentage of people who speak English most often at home. However, fifteen percent of the NPL service area population is either an immigrant or a non-permanent resident of Canada, demonstrating that language data does not fully capture the diversity of the local population. Over 5% of the population identifies as Indigenous, including First Nations (2.4%) and Métis (3.0%) (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

A full statistical profile of the NPL service area is provided in Appendix 1.

Library Profile

The information below is supplemented by a full statistical profile and service inventory in Appendix 1.

SERVICE POPULATION

The Nelson public library reports a total estimated service population of roughly 21,500 (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a); however, this figure includes all of the RDCK Area H population, when in actuality only the Area H south population contributes to the library. The adjusted service population is 19,461. This population is smaller than that of the full NPL service area because of the participation of

rural areas in library funding (see *Funding* below). There are 10,891 total card holders (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a). Sixty-six percent of City of Nelson residents hold a library card, while 41% of Area F residents, 25% of Area H South residents, and 20% of Area E residents do the same. Eighty-six percent of cardholders are adults, and the remainder are children/youth (L. Harris, pers. comm.).

SERVICES PROVIDED AND LEVELS OF USE

NPL provides services to children, teens, adults, and seniors through a variety of collections (books, e-books and other electronic resources, library of things, etc.), programs (story times, reading clubs, author events, skill workshops, etc.), technology access (a tech hub, printing services, loanable laptops or Chromebooks, etc.), spaces (dedicated children’s and teens’ areas, bookable quiet rooms, etc.) and outreach (book delivery to rural communities and seniors care facilities).

The relative value of different types of services to the community has shifted in recent years. For example, while total circulation of all materials has increased over the last 5 years, circulation of print and other materials decreased, demonstrating a rising interest in electronic resources. Over the same period, the number of people accessing wireless internet services at the library increased by more than twofold (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a).

Compared to peer libraries¹, NPL has slightly higher circulation and a lower number of physical volumes held, in person visitation, and program participation (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a).

FACILITY

NPL’s facility is in a building shared with the Nelson Police Department. The 13,000 square feet (0.6 ft²/serviced individual) of total usable space dedicated to the library is an average size among peer libraries¹ in British Columbia, though facilities built in the last 15 years (Whistler, Powell River) are bigger, at 0.8-0.9 ft² per serviced individual. The facility includes 62 public seating spaces, less than the average among peers (103). 8,600 square feet are available for public use.

Libraries in BC have varying arrangements with facility owners, co-located tenants, or municipalities in terms of facility expenses. The NPL facility is owned by the City of Nelson. NPL pays for utilities, janitorial services, and minor repairs. The City manages the HVAC system, exterior doors, and other structural repairs. When there is a major renovation project, the library normally contributes a portion (from grants) with the City covering the remaining facility improvement expenses (T. Therrien, pers. comm).

FUNDING

NPL is funded through a combination of local government contributions (62% in 2023), provincial grants (28%) and other sources (10%). Local government revenue comes from the City of Nelson (80% of total local government revenue in 2024a), and the two regional district electoral areas that contribute through taxation—Area F and the southern portion of Area H. Area E does not contribute through taxation, through some funds are received from the Area Director in order to provide children with library cards at no cost to their families. NPL’s total revenue in 2023 was \$1.38 million (\$64 per serviced

¹ The libraries included in the peer library analysis are Powell River, Sechelt, Squamish, Cranbrook, Dawson Creek, Terrace, and Whistler. All have service populations of between 19,000 and 28,000 with the exception of Whistler which has a service population closer to 14,000. Whistler was included in the analysis because it is recognized to serve a larger effective population (due to the prevalence of tourism in the Whistler area) and the lessons it has to offer related to funding.

individual) (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a). It should be noted that in 2023, all BC public libraries received a one-time Enhancement Grant (\$293,829 for Nelson). As a result, the figures above reflect a year with a higher-than typical overall revenue and revenue from provincial sources.

Compared to peer libraries¹, Nelson's 2023 revenue profile was more dependent on grants/other sources and less dependent on local government contributions. Of note, the component of NPL's local government revenue coming from rural regional district areas (20%) is misaligned with the component of the service population who lives in those areas (43%). The component of total expenses dedicated toward staffing at NPL (77%) is higher than peer libraries (70%) and the amount dedicated to facilities is slightly lower. NPL staff noted that, because NPL's overall per capita revenue is lower than peer libraries, expenses are more heavily weighted toward essential staffing expenses (T. Therrien, pers. comm.).

The research team noted that the service area used to calculate NPL's annual provincial grants does not match the true serviced area (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024). The grant population is based on the City of Nelson and all of Areas F and H. It does not include Area E despite providing services to that population in ways that do not require a library card (programming, use of the facility, etc.).

Local Change Drivers

We completed a review of local research, plans, and policy to identify factors that may drive change in the Nelson area and affect future needs of the community regarding the library. Results are summarized by theme below.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND AIR QUALITY

The Nelson area's climate is changing and is projected to continue changing through at least the next several decades. Temperatures are warming across all seasons, seasonal precipitation patterns are changing, and weather is becoming more extreme. This is translating to community impacts like smoky skies and intense heat waves (Selkirk Innovates, 2023).

Library patrons believe NPL has an important role to play in supporting community climate action, both in how it conducts its operations and how it supports library users to take action themselves (WCS Engagement + Planning, 2022). Support for NPL to participate in meaningful climate action is bolstered by the City of Nelson which has set a target to reduce community-wide GHG emissions by 75% by 2040, including net zero municipal operations by 2030 (City of Nelson, 2021)

AFFORDABILITY

There are many statistics pointing to an increasing affordability problem in Nelson and beyond. About a fifth of the NPL service area population experiences housing unaffordability (Selkirk Innovates, 2023b), and annual inflation has been as high as 8% in recent years, though recent indications are that this trend is leveling out (Statistics Canada, 2024). A recent housing needs study found that an annual household income of \$150,000, well above the actual average, is needed to purchase a house in Nelson (M'akola Development Services, 2024).

A lack of housing affordability affects an individual or household's ability to meet other basic needs. Libraries support affordability by providing low- or no-cost access to information and technology. Patrons believe that NPL has an important role to play in addressing issues like affordability and poverty,

though have stressed the importance of finding a balanced approach that does not compromise the core mandate (WCS Engagement + Planning, 2022).

DISAPPEARING SOCIAL SERVICES

Related to the point above, social services are generally at capacity in the Nelson area and other small communities, and the loss of an important social service has ramifications for all organizations that support vulnerable populations—including NPL. Two examples in Nelson include the closure of the Coordinated Access Hub in 2024, which previously provided centralized homelessness, health, and employment services. Elimination of the breakfast program at Our Daily Bread has also had implications for people experiencing food insecurity.

Libraries, as inclusive, welcoming, and free-to-access spaces, are increasingly stepping in to fill gaps in social services. NPL patrons acknowledge the importance of this role; however, they also stress the need to maintain an environment that fulfills its core purpose and remains welcoming to all (WCS Engagement + Planning, 2022).

RECONCILIATION AND INDIGENIZATION

Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is a priority for all levels of government, including the City of Nelson who has included reconciliation measures in its strategic plan (City of Nelson, 2023) and included a reconciliation goal in its 2050 vision statement (City of Nelson, 2024). The 2021 Supreme Court of Canada ruling that restored the rights of the Sinixt Peoples has been celebrated as the first step in the Sinixt People returning to their traditional territories, which include the NPL service area.

Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called on the library sector to support reconciliation by ensuring access to the truth about residential schools and the impacts of colonization (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). NPL patrons also believe the library has a role to play in truth and reconciliation (WCS Engagement and Planning, 2022).

POLARIZATION/CULTURE WARS

Across Canada, political and cultural polarization has been increasing on topics such as gender, climate change, and race. Jennie Baron, Selkirk College researcher and lead of the [Courageous Dialogues](#) project, has said that polarization is “a meta-level problem we have to deal with, as it’s getting in the way of addressing other problems because we can’t talk about them in constructive ways” (Boivin, 2023, p. 3).

NPL experienced the impacts of polarization firsthand when it had to cancel a Drag Storytime event in 2023 as a result of a misinformation campaign and online backlash which included threats against the library (Harper, 2023). Another local example of the impacts of polarization is the challenges experienced by the Regional District of Central Kootenay when attempting to adopt a new climate action plan (Boivin, 2023).

INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESS

In a recent patron satisfaction survey, over three quarters of respondents said they felt library staff were welcoming all the time, suggesting a high level of community satisfaction with some room for improvement. The same survey showed that 9% of respondents experience some type of barrier to accessing library services. Most cited barriers related to NPL’s opening hours, parking availability, challenges with the website, and difficulty understanding how to access online resources. Limited public

transit can also make library access challenging, especially for out-of-town or lower income patrons (Nelson Public Library, 2023).

Indications are also that inclusivity will be a core policy direction for the City of Nelson in the coming years, as the Official Community Plan renewal process has set “a welcoming and compassionate community” as a central element of the future community vision (City of Nelson, 2024).

ECONOMIC SHIFTS

The Nelson area’s economy is continuously evolving and diversifying, and this affects community needs as well as the makeup of potential library partners. Tourism has been central to the Nelson economy for decades, but there is a recognition of a need to diversify this sector to account for potential climate change impacts on the viability of outdoor experiences. Envisioned solutions involve bolstering the area’s arts, culture, and heritage sectors (Breen & Annett, 2022), and further developing vibrant public spaces alongside charming buildings (City of Nelson, 2024).

An influx of remote workers also has implications for the Nelson area economy and NPL. In 2021, 21% of Nelson workers worked from home (Statistics Canada, 2023b). Remote workers seek vital communities with spaces that foster social connection and provide access to flexible synchronous work or meeting locations when needed.



Future Needs

Literature Review

We conducted a literature review to gather information on how libraries across North America are being affected by social, cultural, economic, and environmental trends, and how those trends are affecting the needs of the communities they serve. Below, we summarize information gathered in relation to key trends and present a synopsis of how each trend relates to the Nelson context.

CROSS-SECTOR INITIATIVES

Cross-sector initiatives are increasingly a strategy employed by libraries. Partnerships and collaborations are powerful ways for libraries to meet the diverse needs of their evolving communities. By partnering with other community organizations, libraries can expand their offerings to include non-traditional programming and increase capacity without the need to grow their staff. The ability to offer diverse programming and engage multiple stakeholders in the library can result in more innovative services that better reflect and serve the local community (Mt. Auburn and Associates, 2022). For instance, collaborations like a native plant workshop hosted by the Kootenay Native Plant Society benefit both the library and the native plant society. The library gains an engaging program that draws community interest, while the Kootenay Native Plant Society advances its mission of community education and outreach. This approach allows libraries to connect patrons with valuable information and experiences without requiring library staff to be experts in every subject (Palmer, 2022).

Co-locating with other organizations that have overlapping mandates is becoming another popular way for libraries to partner and has many benefits.

- **Cost Savings:** Sharing overhead expenses, such as utilities, equipment, maintenance, and administrative services, reduces the financial burden on each organization involved (Honasan et al., 2021).
- **Expanded Funding Opportunities:** Partnerships can unlock new funding sources that are relevant to the sector the partner operates in. This includes grants and sponsorships that support collaborative initiatives, benefiting both the library and its partners. (American Library Association, 2023)
- **Increased Foot Traffic:** Partner organizations bring their own patrons, which boosts overall foot traffic and heightens awareness of the library's services and collections (Arts Council England, 2013).
- **Joint Marketing Efforts:** Collaborative marketing and promotional campaigns enhance visibility for all parties involved, proving more effective than individual efforts (Mt. Auburn and Associates, Inc, 2022).

The Nelson Public Library has established programming-focused partnerships with upwards of 30 local organizations and often hosts the types of cross-sector information sessions described above. NPL's partnership roster, however, includes some notable gaps. Sectors such as tourism, education, business and arts and culture have significant overlaps in their mandates with the library, but currently, the

library lacks formal partnerships with some foundational local organizations in these sectors, and there are opportunities to expand and formalize collaborative initiatives.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND THE LIBRARY'S ROLE AS A TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCE

As technology rapidly evolves, there is an increasing need to keep all members of society informed and digitally literate. Libraries play a crucial role by providing free access to technology and education on using new tools (Honasan et al., 2021; Arts Council England, 2013; Shared Intelligence, 2024).

Additionally, evolving technology demands higher levels of information literacy, including skills in protecting personal privacy and navigating copyright and intellectual property rights. Public libraries are uniquely positioned to bridge the growing digital divide which has the potential to deepen inequities if not addressed (Honasan et al., 2021).

Moreover, digital literacy is regarded as one of the most important workforce-related services offered by public libraries, enhancing residents' ability to access training, secure employment, and advance their careers (Mt. Auburn and Associates, 2022). With 45% of Canadians lacking the necessary skills for the knowledge economy (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023), the value of these services cannot be overstated. Research indicates that every dollar invested in urban libraries generates six dollars in community economic impact, a compelling return in an era of increasing unaffordability (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023).

Emerging technologies are transforming how libraries deliver services to patrons in distant neighborhoods and homebound citizens. The increased digitization of traditional materials allows for easier access to books and resources online (Honasan et al., 2021). In some regions, drones are being utilized to deliver materials directly to people's homes, particularly those who are otherwise unable to visit the library (Center for the Future of Libraries, 2024). Libraries are also expanding their reach through online venues, offering virtual programs and resources that connect patrons without requiring physical visits (Palmer, 2022).

The Nelson Public Library aims to meet the community's needs by offering digital literacy and technology workshops and providing access to technology through the Tech Hub. Additionally, some rural communities in the Nelson area lack adequate broadband internet access (Government of Canada 2024), making the library's 14 public computers and Wi-Fi service an essential resource for these areas. The library has an extensive online collection of eBooks and audiobooks for all ages, including a French language collection, and specialized online resources for patrons with disabilities. Additionally, the Nelson Public Library provides patrons with free access to online courses, online newspapers and magazines as well as online streaming options. Frequently noted in past patron surveys was the need for more support and assistance in accessing these digital resources.

These technology rich services support residents as well as the local technology sector. This sector is rapidly growing in the Kootenay region, but rural technology companies face barriers to growth, including a lack of qualified talent (Schrottenbaum et al., 2020). Greater community access to technology can foster interest and skills in tech-related fields.

CHANGING NATURE OF LIBRARY PATRONS

As technology continues to evolve, so too do the needs and behaviours of library patrons. A new generation, predominantly Gen Z, has grown up with smartphones, significantly altering how they interact with media. Unlike previous generations, these “digital natives” not only consume media but also identify as content creators (Noorda & Berens, 2022). Libraries are adapting by offering access to equipment such as recording devices, cameras, and green screens, along with providing workshops and one-on-one support for patrons engaging in media creation (Palmer, 2022). Interestingly, the library space and even its book collection are often used as backdrops for the content being produced by these creators (Noorda & Berens, 2022).

Gen Z patrons, described as entrepreneurial learners, are accustomed to self-directed education via internet resources such as YouTube tutorials (Palmer, 2022). Libraries play a key role in supporting this demographic by offering spaces for continued learning after school and ensuring that patrons can identify misinformation and disinformation—critical skills in an evolving media landscape (Shared Intelligence, 2024). Libraries are further addressing these needs by creating makerspaces, offering virtual programs, and redesigning physical spaces to better accommodate evolving demands (Honasan et al., 2021).

Social media plays a significant role in how Gen Z discovers and engages with books, with platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube becoming major sources for recommendations (Noorda & Berens, 2022). Despite the growth of digital media, browsing physical library shelves remains important for Gen Z, as print books are still their preferred format, and 27% of them discover new books through shelf browsing (Noorda & Berens, 2022). However, accessing digital collections can be challenging due to long wait times, which conflicts with Gen Z’s preference for instant access (Noorda & Berens, 2022). Additionally, the rise of book piracy, driven by unmet immediate needs and the relative ease of access, presents issues for libraries and authors (Shared Intelligence, 2024).

A growing number of Gen Z and Millennials are identifying as gamers and this is also influencing the way libraries cater to their patrons. Game collections and dedicated gaming rooms within libraries offer patrons not only access to video games but also a physical space where they can meet face-to-face with others who share their interests (Noorda & Berens, 2022).

As social media usage continues to rise, many individuals, especially Gen Z and Millennials, are seeking balance through social media “detoxes.” While these platforms offer connectivity, they can also contribute to information overload and fatigue. The increased need for breaks from the digital world highlights the desire for more authentic, in-person interactions. Libraries serve as crucial venues for these face-to-face experiences, offering safe, community-centered environments where people can gather (Shared Intelligence, 2024).

The Nelson Local Health Area is projected to grow by more than a quarter over the next 20 years, and the distribution of the population is expected to be weighted more heavily toward the 30-60 age group (Ministry of Citizens’ Services, 2024). A growing population will increase demand for various library services, particularly those catering to digital natives, knowledge creators, entrepreneurial learners, and other characteristics that emerge as Generation Alpha ages. Currently, the Nelson Public Library connects with patrons through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The library offers a digital collection and operates a Tech Hub, with workshops and online resources

available to teach patrons how to effectively use the technology provided in the Hub. There is also a Teen Scene area in the library with comfy seating, teen fiction, free menstrual products available, as well as a fridge supplied with food.

While there are some notable shifts in the nature of library patrons, especially across generations, research shows that there are some population groups that are persistently underrepresented at libraries. These include men, racialized groups, seniors, and people with lower levels of educational attainment (Horrigan, 2016). Anecdotal evidence from the Nelson Public Library suggests that conditions are slightly different locally, in that seniors are well represented but young adults (18-30) are not (T. Therrien, pers. comm.)

LIBRARIES AS A SOCIAL COMMONS

Libraries are evolving beyond their traditional role as book repositories to become vibrant spaces where people can gather, share ideas, and connect with others (CBC Radio, 2018). As critical community infrastructure, public libraries have become increasingly important, especially in communities where other face-to-face meeting spaces are disappearing (Shared Intelligence, 2024). As one of the few public spaces where people can gather freely, libraries are adapting their physical environments to better accommodate these community needs. Reflecting this shift, many libraries now measure success by foot traffic rather than circulation data (CBC Radio, 2018).

To support this evolving role, libraries are redesigning their physical spaces to encourage gathering (Honasan et al., 2021). Emerging trends include the creation of outdoor spaces with decks, Wi-Fi, play structures, and benches (CBC Radio, 2018). Many are incorporating attractive features such as rooftop gardens, verandas, teen centers, movie theaters, gaming rooms, art galleries, and cafés. Across the globe, libraries are hiring world-renowned architects to create stunning designs that draw both visitors and locals (Krueger, 2019). This emphasis on the vibrancy and comfort of the physical space has the dual effect of supporting local gathering and bolstering the local tourism industry (Krueger, 2019; Adhikary & Adhikary, 2021).

Programming that fosters community connections further supports the library's role as a social commons. For instance, infant and toddler story times provide new parents with opportunities to connect with others (Noorda & Berens, 2022). Canadian libraries are also advancing reconciliation by offering Indigenous film screenings, craft-making workshops, celebrations, and hosting Elders and storytellers-in-residence. They also support Indigenous language revitalization through various programs (Rathi & Wiebe, 2020). Innovative initiatives such as citizen science projects engage community members in research, enhancing social cohesion and improving public perceptions of libraries' social value (Cigarini et al., 2021). By connecting people with meaningful activities, libraries reinforce their status as essential community spaces that contribute to social well-being.

Libraries are increasingly recognized as crucial community hubs, offering essential services that extend far beyond traditional book lending. They play a key role in combating social isolation, which has been identified as one of the most significant societal impacts of libraries today (Shared Intelligence, 2024). As rural senior populations grow, access to robust resources becomes even more critical (Office of the Seniors Advocate, 2024). Engaging with society is vital for aging successfully at home, and libraries are playing an important part in this process (Office of the Seniors Advocate, 2024).

The Nelson Public Library is centrally located in Nelson, occupying the basement and first floor of a building shared with the local police department. The basement serves as a dedicated children’s area, featuring children’s books and an open space for play. Upstairs houses the Teen Scene area, a variety of collections separate from the children’s collection, and two small bookable meeting rooms. The library provides seating for reading, studying, and working, with a total of 62 chairs—significantly below the average of 103 chairs for peer libraries.

It was noted in NPL’s Provincial Library Grant Report from 2022 that the library’s total space is about 20% smaller than industry standards for a community serving 19,000 residents (Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2022). With the population expected to increase by 28% over the next 20 years, space constraints will become more significant. The facility was last renovated 12 years ago in 2012 and has not undergone major updates since. Past patron satisfaction surveys have highlighted a desire for affordable, bookable spaces, more cozy corners for reading, easier accessibility to the children’s area, and complaints about the current lighting conditions.

The library also serves several rural communities with limited public transit access, typically once or twice a day. There is no designated parking for library patrons, and street parking is limited.

Despite space constraints, the library offers engaging programs for children, youth, adults, and seniors, striving to meet the community’s needs within its current limitations.

The City of Nelson’s Official Community Plan (OCP), along with key policies such as the Sustainable Waterfront and Downtown Master Plan, Nelson Path to 2040 Sustainability Strategy, and the Downtown Urban Design Strategy, all align with a library facility design that emphasizes a social commons approach. Policy directions for the renewed OCP specifically highlight vibrant public spaces and year-round tourism as two of its four foundational values. As the climate changes, diversifying tourist amenities to include vibrant indoor spaces will be crucial for sustaining the industry.

LIBRARIES AS PROVIDERS OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

As public services and social safety nets face cutbacks, libraries have stepped in to fill gaps left by government agencies. In response to climate change and increasing social needs, libraries have evolved into agile responders, providing critical support during crises (Canadian Urban Institute, 2023). For example, libraries serve as warming centers during winter storms and cooling centers during heatwaves, becoming key players in emergency response efforts (Palmer, 2022; Young, 2018). They also provide timely, accurate information during times of mass confusion and act as emergency food distribution sites, addressing basic needs during difficult periods (Pannozzo et al., 2022; Bach, 2024; Young, 2018).

Library staff are often trained in life-saving measures such as administering Naloxone for opioid overdoses and distributing safe drug-testing kits, directly addressing public health crises (Bach, 2024). “Libraries of Things” make essential health equipment, such as blood pressure monitors, crutches, and wheelchairs, available to the public (Bach, 2024). Some libraries even have in-house nurses to assist with Naloxone administration and provide mental health first aid (Vermes, 2023), highlighting their role as frontline responders in community health and safety.

Beyond emergency response, some libraries collaborate with social service providers to offer on-site access to healthcare, mental health counseling, job placement assistance, and legal aid (Marsdin et al.,

2023). They also address food insecurity by acting as distribution centers and providing information on food programs (Pannoza et al., 2022; Bach, 2024). This integrated service model allows libraries to function as one-stop hubs for social support, meeting a wide range of community needs in accessible locations (Honasan et al., 2021).

The rise of libraries as social service providers has not come without tension. Libraries have seen a rise in security incidents, including physical and verbal assaults, drug and alcohol use, suspected overdoses, and thefts (Zoledziowski et al., 2024). To address these challenges, some libraries have employed social workers to help manage mental health crises and support de-escalation efforts (Marsdin et al., 2023), though these types of services require dedicated space and some libraries have discontinued them. In response to these growing needs, some U.S. universities now offer joint Social Work and Library Studies degrees (Zoledziowski et al., 2024).

With the closure or reduction of social services for vulnerable populations, the Nelson Public Library is experiencing an increase in the number of unhoused individuals seeking refuge and services. The recent closure of the Coordinated Access Hub in March 2024, a critical safe space for people experiencing homelessness, has intensified this trend. With the Hub's closure, services such as access to public computers are now only available at the Nelson Public Library, increasing its role as a frontline provider of support for vulnerable populations (Nelson Public Library, 2023).

Staff at NPL are committed to providing compassionate care and service to all patrons. However, the management of social issues such as drug use, mental health crises, and homelessness is not what library staff are trained for, and they are feeling the strain (Nelson Public Library, 2023).

The Nelson Public Library has been consistently acting as a refuge from extreme weather: smoke and extreme heat in the summer and cold wet weather in the winter. As the area's climate continues to change over the coming decades, with more extreme weather expected (Selkirk Innovates, 2023), there will be an increasing need for refuge services, including extended hours and increased seating.

LIBRARY FUNDING MODELS

Public libraries in British Columbia are generally funded by a combination of local government contributions, provincial grants, other grants (e.g., non-municipal capital grants applied for by the library), and other sources (fines, donations, etc.), with local government contributions making up most of the revenue. The nuances within each library's specific funding model point to opportunities to work within this overarching system to expand contributions or find creative ways of accessing new sources of funding. We examine three of NPL's peer libraries in the following paragraphs.

The Powell River Public Library has a new facility that opened in 2017. This new facility came with a substantial increase in funding, with total revenue increasing from \$0.9 to \$1.4 million over the period 2015-2018 (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2023). The share of local government revenues coming from the municipality and regional district is calculated in such a way that it roughly matches the number of cardholders residing in each jurisdiction (Galinski, 2023). Powell River's facility expenses are highest among all peer library examined, at 20% of total expenses (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a).

The Sechelt Public Library adopted a new 5-year funding model in 2021 following two years of community conversations and negotiations (Woodrooffe, 2021). The new model links the value of local

government contributions to the component of total serviced residents residing in each jurisdiction. It responded to a grassroots petition asking for fair funding for the library in a model that matched the approach in place at other Sunshine Coast libraries (Sechelt Public Library, 2018). Local reports indicated that it was difficult for the community to come to agreement over library funding, with some suggesting a need to move to a regional district service, similar to how many recreation or waste management services are funded (Woodrooffe, 2021).

The Whistler Public Library benefits from a facility that was built in association with the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games. Their total revenue is unprecedented among NPL's peer libraries at over \$145 per serviced individual in 2023 (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a). Staff shared that, while the service population is formally set at 14,500, they calculate the need for space, services, and budget at a figure roughly double that out of recognition of the volume of local tourism activity and how the library supports visitors (M. Fenton, pers. comm). Whistler also benefits from philanthropic contributions, with one group, the "American Friends of Whistler", noted as having supported library investments in the past.

Community Engagement

METHODS

We conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with 17 participants representing priority organizations and underrepresented groups, including those from the arts and culture sector, educational institutions, business, rural residents, the City of Nelson, young adults, and racialized communities. We selected many of these groups based on their underrepresentation in the library's current services and outreach, seeking their input to guide future programming, collections, operations, budgeting, and advocacy efforts.

We held the interviews remotely via Zoom. Each interview included 5-7 open-ended questions designed to explore the needs and priorities of the underrepresented groups. We include sample interview questions in Appendix 3, and a list of interviewed organizations in Appendix 4. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in the discussions while ensuring we consistently covered key topics across all interviews.

Following the interviews, we thematically coded transcripts using NVivo software. Our analysis below includes the number of times a given theme was referred to in the interviews. This provides a measure of the importance of the theme to our group of interviewees.

RESULTS

REACHING OUT TO RURAL RESIDENTS

NPL cardholder statistics confirm that rural residents are underrepresented among patrons (see Appendix 1). The most significant barrier indicated by rural residents and businesses is the general lack of awareness about the library's resources, with many residents unaware of the full range of services it offers (22 references). A major reason for the lack of awareness is outdated perceptions. Many still view the library as primarily a place for books, an image that persists especially among older generations who may never have used it and are unaware of its evolution. Further, there is a lack of knowledge about the

full range of services the library provides, such as the "Library of Things" or programs that could enrich their lives. The broader role the library plays in supporting community well-being and access to information is also not well understood. Communication gaps have exacerbated this issue. Despite the library's concerted efforts to reach the community, residents in rural areas are often hard to communicate with effectively. Past issues with the newsletter signup system hindered outreach, leaving many uninformed. Even with attempts to engage, consistent messaging has been difficult to maintain. Newer residents, especially those working remotely, may not even be aware the library exists or what it offers.

Distance is another key barrier, as the library is often seen as being located too far away for regular use, especially when alternative sites that offer some library services are located closer to home (7 references). Rural residents indicated that many do not leave their communities frequently, and with the library located in Nelson—sometimes a 40-minute drive or more—the trip becomes inconvenient, especially for accessing programs and services. As a result, the library is seen as a distant, inaccessible place rather than a service that reaches their area. Also described was a perception of exclusivity, with some residents feeling that the library's focus is primarily on Nelson, leaving them excluded. Transportation issues further complicate access, as not all areas are well-served by public transit, making it difficult for certain demographics to reach the library. Seasonal challenges also play a role, particularly for seniors. In winter or during evening events, travel becomes more difficult and dangerous, further limiting attendance.

"It's onerous for people to access programming that is a 40-minute drive away, in their mind at least"

Rural residents also highlighted the availability of more convenient or closer alternatives as a reason for not using the Nelson Public Library (6 references). Many split their time between different towns for work, errands, and activities, making it more practical to use libraries in these areas. The OneCard system provides flexibility, allowing residents to hold memberships at multiple libraries and choose the most convenient one. Additionally, similar services offered by the Nelson Public Library, such as tech hubs and printing, are available in places like WE Graham and Winlaw, reducing the need to travel to Nelson for these resources.

When rural residents do visit Nelson, they describe their trips as carefully planned "errand days" with little time for leisure (7 references). These trips, which typically happen once every week or ten days, are focused on completing essential tasks like grocery shopping or medical appointments, leaving little time to visit the library. While the library may serve as a "treat" or entertainment during these trips, especially for children, it is not a priority due to the stress and busyness of the day. For some, the library is used as a practical stop—a meeting spot for carpools or a place to pass time while waiting for a ride or the infrequent bus. It also serves as a workspace, offering internet access and printing services, though the lack of bookable and soundproof meeting space is noted as a limitation. Overall, residents make strategic use of their time during these town visits, and while they appreciate the library, they rarely have time to fully engage with its offerings.

"A lot of folks out here don't have a lot of leisure time in Nelson, or they don't use Nelson for leisure as often as other places."

Lack of parking (3 references) was also identified as a significant barrier to rural residents and a major reason why they do not visit the library when they are in Nelson.

Finally, elements of rural culture contribute to the lack of library use (9 references). One major factor is anti-government and anti-tax sentiments in some rural communities, where residents mistrust local government entities and are resistant to public services such as libraries. Additionally, a strong independent, libertarian streak among many rural residents means they feel self-sufficient and see little need for public resources like the library. They may view the library's mission with suspicion, feeling it doesn't align with their personal values. While services like the dropbox and pickup program at Slocan Park are useful, there is a perception that they require planning ahead, which can be a deterrent for those who are not fully informed about the details of the service.

Rural residents expressed a strong desire for a comfortable, informal space in the library where they could meet and chat (7 references). Many suggested the need for a more "lounge-like" area, similar to the children's fiction zone but more inviting to those without children. Some respondents recalled positive experiences with cozy, living-room-like spaces in other libraries, featuring chairs, couches, and coffee tables, which fostered comfort and a sense of mutuality without the pressure to socialize. Additionally, residents voiced interest in spaces where people could gather without the expectation of reading, much like public benches in malls. The perception that libraries must remain quiet was seen as a barrier for those looking to relax or chat while waiting for appointments. Some residents also suggested adding a coffee shop or café to make the library more welcoming and better suited to the needs of those spending their "town day" in Nelson.

Rural residents also shared a need for extended library hours to better accommodate their schedules (4 references). Some appreciated the extended summer hours offered during this summer's heat wave and suggested regular evening hours, perhaps twice a week, to help those from out of town. While the library generally meets their needs during town visits, residents mentioned that earlier morning access would also be beneficial. Overall, they appreciated the current hours but welcomed more flexible options to better suit their day-to-day lives.

Rural residents and businesses expressed a strong desire for more outreach from the Nelson Public Library (9 references). Suggestions included hosting outreach events in rural communities, such as Slocan Park, to allow residents to learn about library services. Residents emphasized the importance of community engagement through platforms like Regional Directors' newsletters and local Facebook groups. Spotlighting local residents' success stories with the library could also help raise awareness. There was also interest in expanding current outreach programs, such as those for seniors, and integrating library services into existing community events like the Slocan Valley Family Connections program at Passmore Hall, where the library could provide card applications, offer storytimes, and promote services. Additionally, respondents suggested reviving past outreach efforts, such as visits to the Passmore Senior's Lodge, and expanding them to other rural community spaces. The creation of an outreach position dedicated to visiting rural areas was proposed as a more efficient way to connect with these communities. Public meetings and awareness campaigns were also seen as vital to educating rural residents about the value and services offered by the library.

“...the library is still about books in most peoples’ minds even though it’s a much broader service that.”

A few rural residents voiced interest in having access to a community kitchen within the library, where they could prepare simple meals during their town visits (2 references). This would provide convenience and reduce the burden on working parents, especially if their children could attend a library program while food was being prepared. A community kitchen could offer a practical solution for families spending long days in town.

Rural respondents indicated a desire for additional programming targeted at school-aged children (2 references). Specifically, they suggested drop-in after-school programs from 3-5 PM that do not require pre-registration. They emphasized the importance of spontaneous, low-commitment programming that allows flexibility, as opposed to activities requiring advance planning. For rural teens, who often spend hours in Nelson waiting for buses after school, respondents recommended programming during after-school hours that provides a welcoming, relaxed space for them to hang out.

Several concerns specific to rural residents that the library could potentially address were mentioned once. These are summarized below:

- **Support for Vulnerable Populations:** One respondent highlighted the need for resources and assistance for seniors and low-income individuals, particularly in navigating support systems like tax filing, government program enrollment, and emergency services.
- **Culturally Relevant Programming:** A single respondent emphasized the importance of offering programs on topics such as permaculture, self-sufficiency, and emergency preparedness, which align with rural values and concerns like wildfire risks.
- **Financial Literacy:** One person suggested that the library could provide education on managing finances, filing taxes, and improving access to social services.
- **Expansion of the Library of Things:** One respondent expressed interest in adding agricultural tools to the Library of Things, reflecting practical community needs and replacing a similar service that had recently folded.

ACTIVELY INCLUDING RACIALIZED RESIDENTS

Although the Nelson Public Library already implements many inclusive initiatives—such as displaying diverse stories and featuring racialized authors, hosting anti-racist book clubs, and organizing events focused on intercultural learning—interviewees still suggested these actions (5 references). This indicates a gap in outreach and communication, as many racialized residents may not be fully aware of these efforts. This feedback underscores the need for the library to improve its visibility and engagement with these communities and to continue to refine offerings in a way that responds to racialized residents’ evolving needs.

One recommended strategy was to conduct outreach through culturally specific Facebook and WhatsApp groups, such as "Filipino Kootenays." Expanding partnerships with organizations like InterCultural Kootenays to share programming in these spaces could further strengthen the library’s connection with racialized residents.

Additionally, respondents stressed the importance of hiring more diverse staff (2 references), highlighting that representation within the library is essential to fostering a welcoming environment for all. They also suggested building a more robust collection of books in different languages as a key way to better support racialized communities (2 references).

CALLING IN YOUNG ADULTS (18-30)

An interviewee representing an organization of young adults identified several barriers that limit engagement with the Nelson Public Library among this age group. The library is not commonly discussed in their social circles and is often perceived as irrelevant. There is a lack of awareness about the variety of services the library offers beyond books and a place to read.

Another barrier is the library's hours, which can be difficult for those balancing work or school commitments, making it hard for them to visit during open hours. The lack of parking was also noted as a practical barrier. Moreover, the interviewee expressed a preference for spending time in beautiful and bright locations, such as reading at the beach, rather than visiting the less appealing library space, highlighting the importance of creating a more inviting atmosphere within the library or alternatively, bringing library services further out into the community.

"...they like reading but we do have a beach, and we do have the library, which is quite different, people prefer to go to the beach than rather just going to the library..."

The interviewee suggested several ways the Nelson Public Library could build value for young adults aged 18-30. One idea was to host social events in the library, creating opportunities for community engagement and making the space more relevant to this demographic. Adding a café within the library could also enhance its appeal as a relaxed, social space. The interviewee further recommended offering textbooks for college classes, which would provide practical academic support for students. Additionally, conducting outreach through channels that serve this demographic, such as the Selkirk Student Union, could help raise awareness of the library's offerings and foster stronger connections with this group.

PARTNERING WITH NEW SECTORS

External sectors such as arts, culture, business, and education have been identified as underrepresented in their engagement with the library. The research revealed several reasons for this, highlighting the barriers these sectors face in partnering with and utilizing the library. Some of these sectors have not considered the library as a partner and are unaware of the resources it offers (8 references). They have expressed the need for greater outreach, clearer communication, and time to develop meaningful partnerships (6 references). While there is interest in collaboration, there is an uncertainty on how to initiate partnerships due to unclear pathways and limited capacity (3 references).

Despite these barriers, significant enthusiasm remains among external sectors for forming mutually beneficial partnerships with the library (13 references). Interviewees were eager to promote the library's sector-specific collections and services to their members and offered to host outreach events in collaboration with the library. One Area E-based business association suggested that if business-related

resources were further developed and communicated, the association could include library memberships in their annual fees.

The research identified several ways the Nelson Public Library could support and collaborate with the local arts sector:

- **Space for Events and Gatherings (4 references):** Artists in the region often feel isolated, and arts organizations lack dedicated spaces to host gatherings or meet-ups. There was an expressed interest in partnering with the library to use its meeting spaces for events and discussions that foster artistic exchange.
- **Gallery and Sales Opportunities (4 references):** There is high demand for gallery space in Nelson, and the Trail Library's example of paying CARFAC rates to showcase artists was noted. Additionally, the library could explore selling local artists' books, offering a venue for artists to promote and sell their work.
- **Resources for Artists (2 references):** Many artists don't view the library as a resource hub for art-related materials, such as expensive art books or magazines like *Border Crossing*. It was suggested that regional arts organizations could sponsor magazine subscriptions, which the library could house and lend out, creating a valuable partnership. Additionally, local arts organizations produce publications with each exhibition and would benefit from having a publicly accessible archive.
- **Art Supplies and Equipment (2 references):** Artists in residence often need equipment such as a dye pot or proper camera for documenting their work. The library could expand its "Library of Things" to include such supplies, providing artists access to tools they might not otherwise have funds to purchase or space to store.
- **Youth Programming and Engagement (2 references):** Challenges were noted in sustaining youth engagement in their programming and suggested partnering with the library to develop more exciting and accessible arts programming for youth. Additionally, artists could contribute to library storytime sessions, introducing children to various artistic disciplines, aligning with the broader goal of fostering an arts-focused community. Arts organizations also expressed an ability to provide the library with information about artists in the area in case the library was looking for a specific theme or art discipline to supplement their programming.

Interviewees highlighted several ways the Nelson Public Library could provide valuable support to local businesses and professionals:

- **Outreach at Business Events (2 references):** The library could attend social events hosted by local business associations to promote its services to its members.
- **Adobe Suite and Photography Tools (2 references):** Respondents emphasized the importance of access to resources like the Adobe Suite and a professional camera for taking and editing product photos. Assistance with editing would also be appreciated.
- **Meeting Spaces (2 references):** With the changing nature of work, there is a demand for quiet, professional spaces to hold meetings, including Zoom meetings, especially for those working remotely or on the road, which a coffee shop cannot provide.
- **Mentorship and Workshops (4 references):** Respondents suggested mentorship programs and workshops, such as "how to navigate the changing world as a business owner," to help

entrepreneurs adapt to new challenges. There are already multiple organizations in the Nelson Area that are mandated to provide business training services, so this represents a potential partnership opportunity.

- Tech Learning Opportunities (2 references): Many in the community are resistant to embracing new technologies. Providing in-person business-specific learning opportunities, along with asynchronous options, would help address this need and make technology more accessible to local businesses.

While the Nelson Public Library already offers some of these services, such as access to Adobe Suite and technology workshops, the business community appears to be underinformed about these resources. Increased outreach and communication could help bridge this gap and ensure local businesses are fully aware of the library's offerings.

"I think of the library as a children's resource, not much as a resource for my business."

Representatives from the education sector noted that, despite overlapping missions, their mandates are often siloed and focused primarily on their specific school communities (4 references). However, SD8's renewed strategic plan will prioritize building community partnerships, presenting an opportunity to address this gap and foster stronger collaboration between the library and the school district. Interviewees expressed interest particularly in collaborating on family-friendly literacy initiatives (2 references), community wide information literacy education and advocacy (2 references), and programming to support the integration of international students into the wider community (2 references).

ALIGNING WITH CITY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Interviewees from the City of Nelson highlighted how the future vision for the Nelson Public Library (NPL) could align with the city's Official Community Plan (OCP) and broader policy objectives (3 references). The OCP, currently being updated, is built around four foundational values based on community input. One value particularly relevant to the library is creating a welcoming and compassionate community, where diverse representation is evident among those actively engaged in reconciliation, civic processes, and public life. They highlighted the importance of the library providing opportunities and resources that explain how public processes work, such as the different levels of government, to encourage broader community participation. This would help more residents, particularly those from underrepresented groups, engage in civic life and feel empowered to take part in community processes.

The NPL was identified by city representatives as a community leader in truth and reconciliation efforts (3 references). They noted that without the library's involvement, the City of Nelson would find it difficult to meet its reconciliation goals. The library could further this work by creating a neutral space for reconciliation activities, with funding available for spaces that could serve as gathering areas for truth and healing. Consultation with First Nations and Indigenous communities would determine how these spaces are designed and used, ensuring alignment with broader reconciliation efforts.

Another prevalent interview theme was climate action programming and the Nelson Next climate plan (4 references). Interviewees suggested that the library could play an important role in climate action education by offering programs related to Nelson Next, the city's climate action plan. The library could serve as a hub for information sharing on climate initiatives, continue to provide heating and cooling spaces, and act as a community gathering place for groups to meet and learn about climate resilience. By taking on this role, the library could position itself as a key partner in local climate action efforts.

City representatives expressed support for new and innovative building designs for the library, citing projects like the Hall Street Pier as examples (4 references). They suggested that the future library could incorporate cutting-edge design and sustainability practices, reflecting Nelson's commitment to innovation while meeting community needs. Additionally, interviewees highlighted the provincial government's emphasis on applying an accessibility lens to all new developments. They proposed that the future library could serve as a model for accessibility and inclusive design, positioning it as a leader in forward-thinking architecture and civic engagement.

Discussion about a new facility also stressed the importance of planning for integrated and multiple uses (3 references). Interviewees expressed the view that standalone, purpose-built buildings are not the most effective use of space. They suggested that a future library could be part of a multi-use facility that includes housing, outdoor public spaces, and a daycare as co-located services. This type of integrated space would not only maximize land use but also enhance community connections, positioning the library as a central hub for a variety of services and activities. Incorporating outdoor gathering spaces would also help meet community interaction and engagement goals.

Staff and Board Engagement

Recognizing that the NPL staff and board have a uniquely knowledgeable perspective of community needs relevant to the library, especially in relation to current patrons, our project included a workshop with staff and trustees. The goals of this workshop were to understand perspectives from people internal to NPL about:

- how community needs are changing;
- what NPL can do to serve those needs; and
- how needs align with available resources.

METHODS

We hosted a 2-hour meeting with 15 representatives of the library staff and board. We broadly adopted an appreciative inquiry approach to the workshop, which used dialogue and questions to uncover and build on strengths and opportunities instead of focusing on pitfalls or problems. To provide attendees with a baseline of information on community needs, we prefaced the workshop with a summary of results from our environmental scan, literature review, and community engagement. During the meeting, we asked respondents for their input on five questions:

- What are the library's successes or things it does well?

- Imagine a positive future for the library, 30 years from now. What is your bold idea for what that could look like?
- What are the “no brainer” elements of a future vision (i.e., what did the “bold ideas” miss)?
- What actions would help the library move forward in achieving this ideal future (new programs/services, operational changes, changes to space utilization, professional development, etc.)?
- What resources are needed to implement these actions?

We collected data using a mix of whole group discussion, small group breakouts, and “25/10 Crowdsourcing”. The specific method used for each question is detailed in the results section below along with a summary of the points raised by attendees. A detailed record of the workshop is provided as Appendix 4.

RESULTS

LIBRARY SUCCESSES

Beginning the meeting by reflecting on library strengths and successes laid the foundation for attendees to then consider how strengths could be leveraged in the future. For this question, we asked attendees to take a minute or two to personally reflect on the question and then share their response with their neighbour, after which we had a discussion as a whole group.

Attendees shared that the library is known for service excellence, with staff going above and beyond, fostering strong community relationships, and catering to patrons of all ages. The library provides personalized service, making people feel welcome and ensuring access to books in various formats. It benefits from strong leadership with a proactive board and responsive governance. Additionally, the library shows compassion for vulnerable populations, providing support and care. Finally, NPL excels in children’s programming, offering a successful summer program and a welcoming children’s area.

BOLD VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

We asked attendees to share their bold vision of the library 30 years from now and used a version of the “25/10 Crowdsourcing” method to collect input. This method involves each attendee writing down their idea on an index card which is then scored by five other attendees. Ideas with the highest scores were shared with the group but we collected all cards as a record of responses. We qualitatively analyzed results by identifying themes and noting how many references there were to each theme. In this way, we were able to identify the themes that were most prevalent in the data.

This method is meant to encourage audacious or out-of-the-box thinking, but we found that many attendees were aligned in their vision, and that many visions were centred on an improved facility. Responses included re-envisioning the library as a beautiful, light-filled space (2 references) that features cozy corners, EV charging stations, and energy-efficient, climate-friendly design (5 references). Outdoor space is important, with attendees envisioning community gardens, rooftop gardens, and demonstration spaces that promote sustainability and community engagement (7 references).

The library could include amenities such as a café (3 references), a community gathering space with meeting areas, chat spaces, and dedicated areas for seniors and other community groups (6 references). Despite these new features, some attendees wanted the library to retain a focus on books with

expansive collections (2 references). Some thought the location should be central (2 references) while one attendee also mentioned satellite locations for wider accessibility (1 reference).

Additional features could include a play space (2 references), co-located housing options, such as studio apartments and shared spaces with other organizations (2 references), and coworking spaces (1 reference). Parking is highlighted as an important aspect, with suggestions for ample underground parking (2 references).

A community kitchen (1 reference), Indigenization elements like a First Nations hub and Indigenous teachings (2 references), and a theatre space with modern tech like 360-degree screens or holographics (2 references) could enhance the library's offerings. There could also be a maker space (1 reference) and an expanded Library of Things to reduce consumerism and increase practicality (3 references).

Some believed the library should offer a quiet study area (1 reference), feature a local art gallery (1 reference), and serve as a Community and Social Services Hub, providing a comprehensive array of public services like youth and senior centers (3 references). Events such as writer's clubs and book readings at drive-ins would cater to diverse audiences (2 references). Finally, securing funding and support through provincial grants, strategic partnerships, and innovative fee structures (e.g., renting spaces or equipment) would be critical to future success (3 references).

This vision emphasizes a multi-functional, inclusive space that integrates community needs, technological advancements, and sustainable practices, securing the library's role as a pivotal community hub for the future.

UNDENIABLE ELEMENTS OF A FUTURE VISION

We followed the discussion of bold future visions with a question that asked what the more obvious future directions were in terms of patrons, services, operations, etc. Through a whole-group discussion, we heard that key elements for the library's future include creating in-person spaces where people feel welcome, safe, and can come together. The library should provide access to accurate information, offer specific programming for young adults (18-30) and other groups that are currently underrepresented, and maintain separate, adaptable spaces for different activities. It should be a state-of-the-art, climate-friendly facility with flexible, convivial spaces. Building strong relationships with organizations and individuals is crucial to breaking down barriers and fostering community. Additional ideas include providing access to new tools and equipment and a public phone.

ACTIONS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Having shared visions for the future, we asked the group what was needed to get there in terms of improvements to programs, training, operations, or spaces. For this question, the attendees split into four small groups and then summarized their conversation for the rest of the attendees. We summarized this qualitative data by thematically coding responses.

To move toward its ideal future, attendees thought the library should focus on creating a space that is accessible and welcoming (3 references) while making room for collaboration with the community, including social services (3 references). A couple respondents thought this would be best achieved through a purpose-built space. Both marketing and advocacy for resources (15 references) and partnerships with organizations at all levels are crucial for securing funding and support. This includes finding a way to bring RDCK Area E into the formally serviced area (2 references). Expanding collections

and the library of things, offering e-bike and equipment rentals, and creating coworking spaces will enhance services (6 references).

The library could attract new audiences, such as the 18-30 age group and seniors, through creative programming like speed dating and theatre discussions (6 references). Tourism outreach, potentially involving a guest book and offering a free library pass, could help boost visibility (2 references). Attendees thought diversifying revenue streams with ideas such as rentable spaces and increasing philanthropy will also be key (4 references). Continued professional development for staff on trends and well-being, as well as proactive adaptability, will ensure the library remains responsive to community needs (3 references).

RESOURCES NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS

Finally, we asked attendees to discuss what resources were needed to implement the actions, including:

- how existing assets and strengths can be used, and
- for activities that are not possible with current capacity, what resources or partnerships should be further developed?

As with the previous question, attendees split into small groups and summarized their conversation for the rest of the attendees. We thematically coded this qualitative data.

Results indicate that library staff and trustees believe significant investments in facilities, staffing, funding, community engagement, partnerships, marketing, and advocacy are needed.

Attendees shared that a new, purpose-built facility would be supportive of future goals (4 references), providing flexible and expanded spaces, particularly for the growing Library of Things. If a new facility is not feasible, alternative solutions include optimizing current spaces with mobile shelving, using community storage, and partnering with other organizations for additional space uses that align with their mandate (4 references). Key issues to address are the current space limitations and the absence of in-demand facilities like a kitchen (2 references).

Additional staff and extended hours are needed, along with more flexible staffing arrangements that can accommodate shared office spaces and partnerships with other occupants (5 references).

Attendees recognized that access to new and expanded funds is crucial (10 references), with a need for increased financial resources through direct funding, innovative fundraising events like murder mystery nights, and revenue-generating initiatives such as renting spaces and equipment. A broader provincial campaign for increased funding is also suggested.

Boosting community presence through strategic outreach, engaging underrepresented groups, and hosting events at various community venues were also recognized as vital steps (9 references). Activities like passive programming, story times, games nights, and collaborations with local venues such as theatres and pubs can help enhance visibility and connection.

Building strong collaborations with local businesses, museums, theatres, and other organizations that align with the library's values is essential. Reframing existing relationships to identify mutual needs and shared resources will strengthen community ties (6 references).

Attendees shared a need for dedicated marketing efforts and expertise to raise awareness and promote library services (5 references). Data collection to understand library usage better and demonstrate impact is also crucial for strategic planning and advocacy.

Many responses focused on the need to position the library as an essential service, comparable to healthcare and emergency services, emphasizing its role in community well-being and accessibility (9 references). This positioning will help garner support for the increased resources the library is seeking. Advocacy efforts should focus on gaining support from local governments, demonstrating the library's value as a human right and a provider of essential social supports.

This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of leveraging space, funding, community ties, and advocacy to shape the library's future as a vibrant and essential community hub.



Future Focus Areas and Capacity Analysis

Each component of our research, including the environmental scan, literature review, community interviews and staff/board engagement, identified several needs or drivers for NPL to consider when planning future services and operations. Below, we explore the factors that stood out as priorities across multiple sources of information.

Library Services

SERVICES THAT IMPROVE ACCESS FOR UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

Libraries everywhere continuously seek solutions to barriers that prevent access for underrepresented patron groups. NPL shares this goal and has made efforts to address the needs of rural residents, racialized individuals, young adults, Indigenous Peoples, and other underrepresented groups. Our research indicates there are opportunities to do more.

A first step on this theme could be to improve outreach to groups who represent non-library users. Interviewees asked the library to provide services that, in some cases, already exist. Improved outreach could assist with promotion of current library services, but also generate productive relationships that could be leveraged to further refine services targeted at related groups. For example, an interviewee from the Selkirk College student union suggested the library hold more materials in different languages to appeal to international students. Further consultation could help the library determine priority languages and types of materials.

Multiple underrepresented groups (rural residents, young adults) also mentioned that the library's opening hours prohibit access, and this sentiment has been shared by many patrons in past engagements. If additional budget becomes available to the library, consideration of extended evening hours, or opening on Sundays, would be worthwhile. Of note, NPL is open 20 days less per year than the average of peer libraries.

Multiple rural groups also mentioned a need to have more accessible remote services. While NPL offers "mobile library" services in RDCK Areas H and F, some interviewees felt the limited hours were prohibitive. Future service planning should consider opportunities to improve rural access through extended outreach or locker services that do not need to be staffed.

Our research also identified men as an underrepresented group at public libraries. The research team was not able to identify a men's group that was available to be interviewed. NPL should seek future opportunities to consult on the needs of Nelson area men related to the library.

SERVICES THAT ADVANCE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Some groups that do not regularly engage with the library are interested in getting more involved but need support and time to figure out what a productive partnership could look like. Many unique suggestions were made by interviewees, but these need to be reviewed and further developed to determine their feasibility.

Of note, some of these groups mentioned a desire to see the library opened up for gatherings or events that would help draw their members into the space. Social events for young adults or popup galleries,

especially if they simultaneously showcase library services, could entice non-library users to visit the space and learn about library offerings while strengthening strategic community partnerships.

SERVICES THAT SOLIDIFY NPL’S ROLE AS A LEADER IN COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

NPL, as a trusted purveyor of reliable information, has an important role to play in improving public understanding about civic life and community priorities. Current services already reflect this role, but our research indicates that needs on this theme will grow as social and environmental challenges persist, and communities seek intermediaries that can bridge the gap between polarized populations. One author encourages libraries “to join forces with other civic literacy proponents to cocreate a more informed and engaged citizenry” that is equipped to fulfill their role in a strong democracy (Kranich, 2024).

Two priorities that our research participants recognized as a good fit with library services are climate action and Indigenization. NPL’s efforts to advance these priorities through collections, events, facilities, and operational changes should be continued and enhanced.

SERVICES THAT DEMONSTRATE NPL’S ROLE AS A PROVIDER OF SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Libraries are increasingly being recognized as an essential service and NPL’s commitment to delivery of critical community functions is important to demonstrate ongoing relevance and garner high levels of support. Improved data on how the library offers these services, gathered through service use tracking or a brief in-person patron survey (e.g., a 1-question exit survey on why they visited the library that day), may help make the case to decision-makers.

NPL’s support for vulnerable populations, and other local organizations that service this group, is a strong example of an essential service. Related partnerships should be leveraged to further explore possible new programs that would best serve local needs and are feasible with available resources. Examples from the library sector (e.g., social work training for librarians, food security supports, collections and programming on social themes) can provide inspiration for future collaborations. NPL should be careful to avoid taking up the role of social service agencies, but there is a spectrum of possible supports, some of which align well with the library’s mandate.

NPL’s service as a refuge for extreme weather or smoke is another example of an essential service that is currently provided and would be important to maintain or expand in the future.

Furthermore, the library stands as one of the few free public spaces where all community members can come together and connect. It offers a welcoming environment for people of all ages to gather, engage in activities, or simply enjoy shared space. In an age of increasing social isolation, the library plays a crucial role in fostering social interaction and building a sense of belonging within the community.

Facility

Space—how much, how it is used, and what it looks like—was a major theme across all forms of research. The library is recognized as an important community commons and Nelson areas residents want more from the space.

NEW FACILITY

Community members and staff shared many (often aligned) visions for what a library of the future could look like. Some of the themes that we heard repeatedly included more conversational seating, separate quiet areas, beautiful light-filled rooms, bookable meeting or event spaces, enhanced integration with the outdoors, and improved access (including parking). Many of these needs cannot be met in NPL's existing facility given its location and space constraints.

NPL previously worked with an architect to develop a proposal for a new facility next to City Hall. While this proposal was not funded, NPL should continue to explore opportunities to develop a new facility. The previously-developed plan included many aspects that reflect community needs—it:

- included flexible spaces that could be booked for use by other organizations;
- incorporated accessible design;
- made room for casual community interactions and a social commons;
- set aside a space for truth, reconciliation, and celebration of Indigenous cultures (to be further planned in accordance with input from First Nations);
- was architecturally distinguished;
- linked to outdoor greenspace;
- integrated underground parking, and;
- embedded multiple uses in that the upper floors of the building were slated for residential development (Stanley Office of Architecture, 2020).

The previously developed plan dedicated 18,760 ft² to the new library. This size is in line with industry standards for between 0.5-1.0 ft² of space per capita (studioHUB Architects, 2020). At current population levels, a 1900 ft² facility would provide 0.9 ft² per capita and this would gradually decrease to 0.7 ft² per capita over the next 20 years.

UTILIZATION OF EXISTING SPACE

Whether or not a new facility is planned, there may be opportunities to reassess how space is utilized at the current facility in order to make room for limited community needs (e.g., more conversational seating and improved space separation). Staff suggested that reconfiguration of stacks using more flexible equipment, or developing a storage site for lesser-used materials, may allow NPL to find some additional space in the current facility. This may be challenging to implement as, among peer libraries, NPL has a lower-than-average amount of space available for public use.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Given the realities of climate change, the City of Nelson's climate action targets, and patrons' interest in seeing NPL show climate leadership, any facility, whether new or old, should incorporate climate action measures. This includes upgrades to reduce emissions associated with building operation (lighting, heating/cooling/ventilation, building envelope improvements, etc.) and improve the resilience of the building to anticipated climate change impacts (extreme heat, increased flooding, more wildfire smoke, etc.)

Human Resources

Human resources are an essential element of the capacity the library can draw on to achieve its mission. Our research generally indicated that the current library staff is excellent, however there are a few opportunities to better meet community needs.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PERSONNEL

Multiple community representatives expressed the need for more outreach to meet diverse groups “where they’re at” (i.e., on pre-existing platforms or at events hosted by other community groups) and transform impressions of the library into a community service rather than just a facility.

Dedicated outreach capacity could also improve NPL’s ability to form and nurture partnerships with organizations whose input could strengthen services aimed at community members who are not already frequent users of the library, including businesses, certain sectors, and individuals from underrepresented population groups.

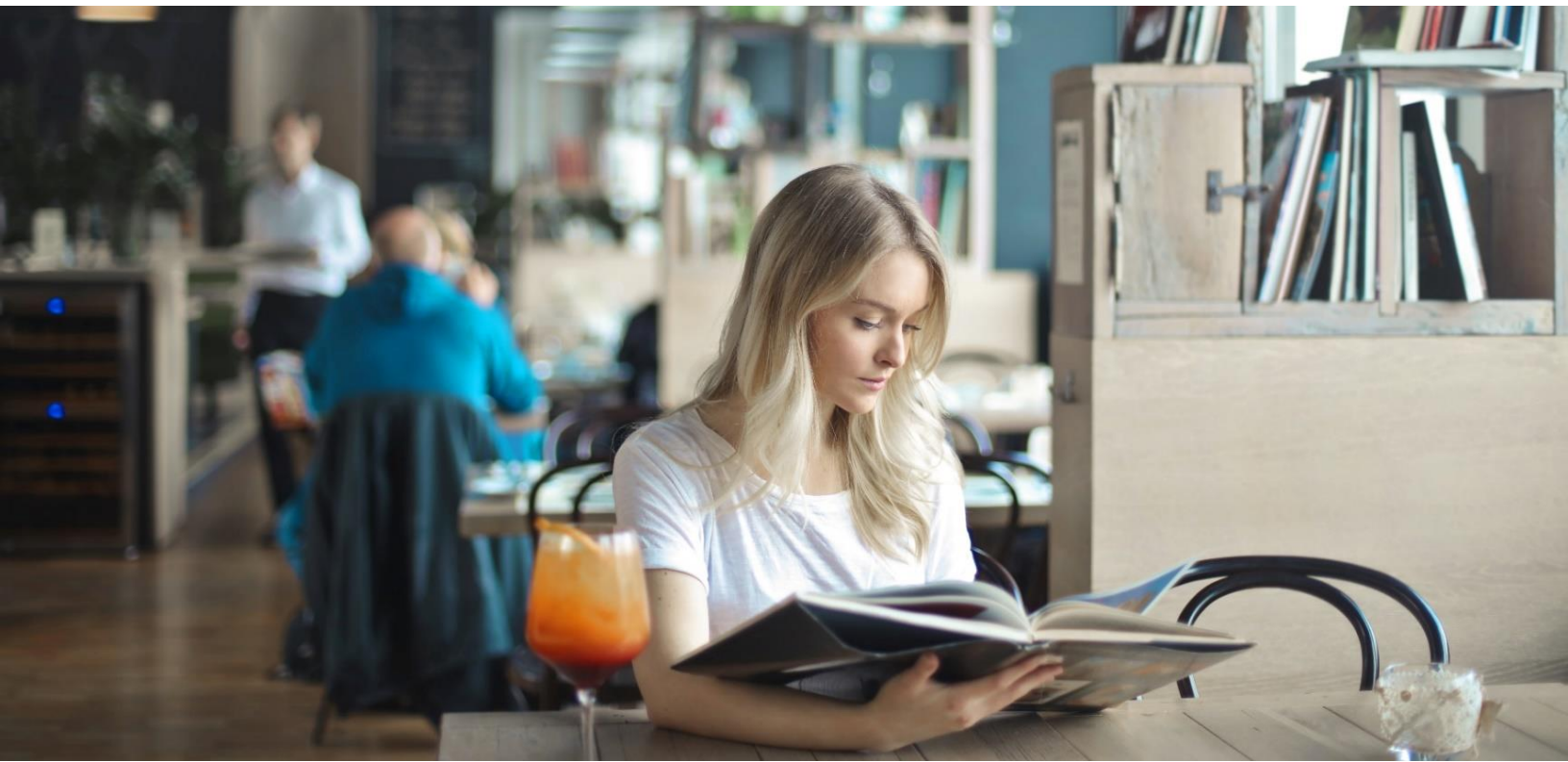
Outreach personnel may benefit from enhanced communications training which could support the need to better promote the many diverse services that NPL provides to the community.

STAFF DIVERSITY

Racialized groups are underrepresented at the library, and an organization of racialized individuals in the Nelson area stressed the importance of hiring more diverse staff. This action could serve as a step toward becoming a more welcoming community where all area residents see themselves represented.

TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

NPL is already playing an important role in making technology accessible to the Nelson area community, and indications are that this role will expand for libraries in the future. It is essential that library staff continue to develop their professional technology skills and bring forth new ideas for how to improve access in a way that enhances digital literacy and supports growth of a technology workforce.



Funding Models

NPL operates on a limited budget and forward progress on many of the recommendations above will not be possible without access to additional funding.

ADVOCATE FOR INCREASED LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Community representatives indicated their groups will likely be resistant to tax increases aimed at enhancing library funding; however, local government contributions are core to the library funding model, and statistics show that local government contributions are below what is standard among NPL's peer libraries. Per capita local government funding needs to increase by \$10 to be considered average. Municipal and regional district per capita funding levels are both lower than the peer average, but the discrepancy is especially pronounced for regional district contributions (\$20.84 per capita for NPL vs. \$30.25 for peers). Among peer libraries, regional district per capita contributions are generally lower than municipal, but a notable exception is Powell River Public Library, where the funding model specifies that contributions are equitably linked to the percentage of the serviced population living in each jurisdiction. If NPL were to adopt a similar funding model, and rural contributions were increased to be on par with municipal (\$61.35 per capita in 2023) NPL's total revenue would increase by approximately \$338,000. An increase of this scale is likely not justified without a new facility, but these calculations can provide context for discussions between NPL and its local government partners about fair and sustainable future funding.

REASSESS PROVINCIAL GRANT CALCULATION MODEL

NPL's provincial operating grant is calculated on a per capita basis. Our review of documentation around this grant indicates that reassessment of the calculation formula may be advantageous. The service area that currently drives the grant calculation is defined as the City of Nelson, Area H, and Area F. Adding Area E to this calculation would increase the number of serviced individuals and therefore the grant value, though the impact on NPL's budget will be modest (less than \$10,000). NPL provides certain services to Area E even though this region does not support the library through taxation. Local government contributions do not appear to be a determinant of whether or not a jurisdiction can be considered part of a library's service area given that other libraries' calculations include rural areas that do not contribute (e.g., Dawson Creek does not receive any regional district revenue despite 38% of its grant population being in the regional district) (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2023; BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024)

EXPAND PATHWAYS TO PHILANTHROPY AND FUNDRAISING

Libraries are valued community assets that many people and organizations may be willing to directly support financially. Other libraries like Whistler have capitalized by accessing significant philanthropic contributions. While NPL has a fruitful partnership with the Friends of the Library, the visibility of that organization is limited, and their fundraising activities generate modest contributions to the NPL budget. Opportunities to expand the reach of this organization, or initiate a companion organization, could be explored. Some larger public libraries have foundations that raise funds through galas, endowments, merchandise, and giving campaigns.

EXPLORE NEW REVENUE STREAMS

NPL laudably makes its services as accessible as possible by providing most free of charge. A new facility, or updates to the existing facility, may open new revenue streams. These may take the form of rental fees for events or meeting rooms, or rent/profit shares from co-located operations like a café. Strengthened partnerships with new sectors may provide access to alternative granting streams for programs or upgrades that serve that sector's needs while also benefitting the library.

Conclusion

Selkirk Innovates appreciates the opportunity to have worked with the Nelson Public Library to assess community needs and support planning for the next 30 years. Results show that patrons, the wider community, library personnel, and the library sector more broadly are well aligned in the factors they identify as important. Collectively, our research directs NPL to expand services that respond to evolving community priorities, draw in new users, and demonstrate the library's role as critical community infrastructure. To support ongoing improvements to service delivery, NPL will require an expanded or renovated facility, new and enhanced funding streams, and improved staff capacity to reach out into the community and keep pace with the latest trends.



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Appendix 1: Profile of NPL and the Nelson Area

Community Demographics

POPULATION

Table 1: Population of the Nelson Public Library service area in 2016 and 2021 (#), and five-year change (%)

Geography	2021	2016	Five-Year Change
Nelson	11,106	10,572	5.1%
Central Kootenay E	3,897	3,772	3.3%
Central Kootenay F	4,116	3,963	3.9%
Central Kootenay H	5,045	4,655	8.4%
Total Service Area	24,164	22,962	5.2%

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Table 2: Population projection for the City of Nelson and the Nelson Local Health Area, 2024 and 2044 (#), and 20-year change (%)

Geography	2024	2044	Twenty-Year Change (%)
City of Nelson	11,928	15,293	28.2%
Nelson Local Health Area	28,761	36,423	26.6%

(BC Stats, 2024)

AVERAGE AGE

Table 3: Average age of the Nelson Public Library's service area (# of years), 2021

Geography	Average Age (# of years)
Nelson	43
Central Kootenay E	48
Central Kootenay F	45
Central Kootenay H	45

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

POPULATION PYRAMID

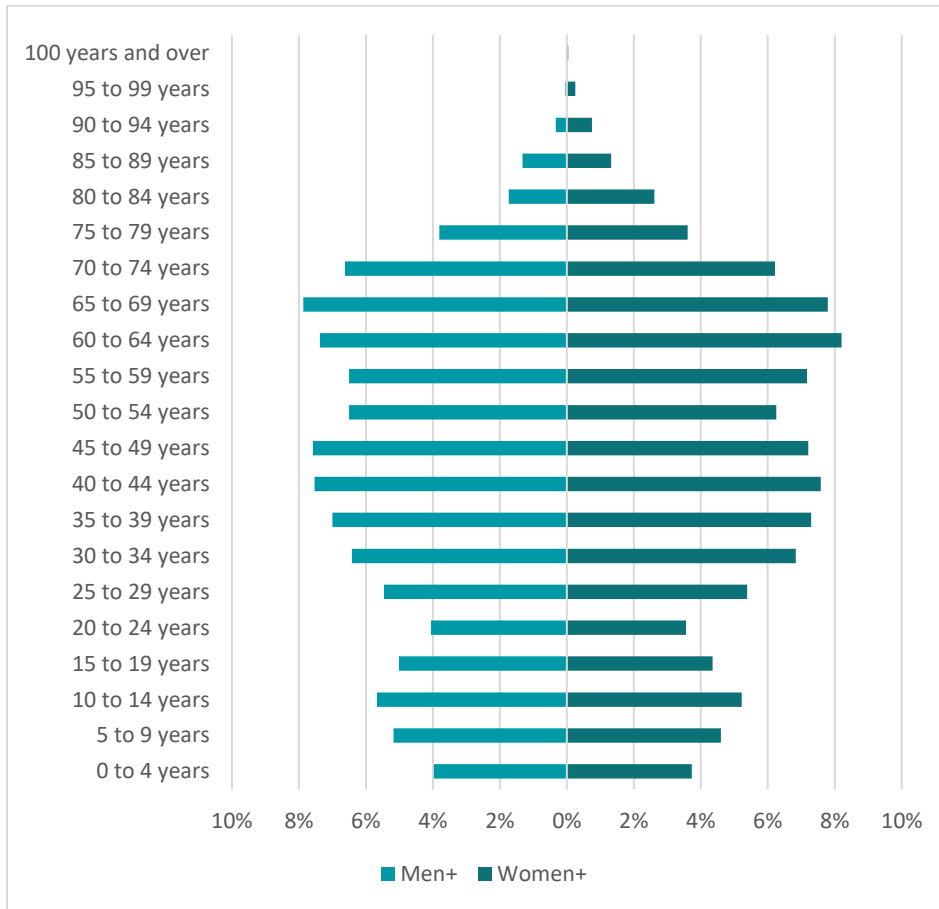


Figure 1: Population of the Nelson Public Library service area by five-year age cohort and gender (%), 2021
(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

HOUSEHOLDS AND AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Table 4: Private households in the Nelson Public Library service area and average household size (#), 2021

Geography	Private Households (#)	Average Household Size (# of people)
Nelson	4,950	2.2
Central Kootenay E	1,800	2.2
Central Kootenay F	1,760	2.3
Central Kootenay H	2,280	2.2
Total Service Area	10,790	n/a

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

HOUSEHOLD TYPE²

Table 5: Private households by type in the Nelson Public Library service area (# and %), 2021

Household Type	Private Households (#)	Private Households (%)
One-census-family households without additional persons	6,005	55.6%
Couple-family households	5,135	47.5%
With children	2,085	19.3%
Without children	3,045	28.2%
One-parent-family households	875	8.1%
Multigenerational households	145	1.3%
Multiple-census-family households	85	0.8%
One-census-family households with additional persons	410	3.8%
Two-or-more-person non-census-family households	680	6.3%
One-person households	3,485	32.2%

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Table 6: Average before- and after-tax income of households in the Nelson Public Library service area, 2020

Geography	Average Before-Tax Income of Households (\$)	Average After-Tax Income of Households (\$)
Nelson	\$89,600	\$76,900
Central Kootenay E	\$84,700	\$74,300
Central Kootenay F	\$104,700	\$88,800
Central Kootenay H	\$74,100	\$66,100

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

LOW INCOME MEASURE

Table 7: Total persons with low income (%), 2021

Geography	Total Persons with Low Income (%)
Nelson	15.5%
Central Kootenay E	13.7%
Central Kootenay F	10.1%
Central Kootenay H	21.4%

(Statistics Canada, 2023b)

Table 8: Persons with low income by age bracket (%), 2021

Geography	Individuals Aged 0 to 17	Individuals Aged 18 to 64	Individuals Aged 64 Years Old and Over

² One-census family households without additional persons are comprised of couple family and one-parent family households. Couple family households include those with and without children.

	Years Old with Low Income (%)	Years Old with Low Income (%)	with Low Income (%)
Nelson	14.9%	15.8%	15.0%
Central Kootenay E	14.9%	15.0%	11.6%
Central Kootenay F	9.4%	10.7%	10.9%
Central Kootenay H	24.7%	19.7%	22.7%

(Statistics Canada, 2023b)

LANGUAGE SPOKEN MOST OFTEN AT HOME³

Table 9: Language spoken most often at home in the Nelson Public Library service area (%), 2021

Language Spoken Most Often at Home	Population (%)
English	95.9%
French	0.9%
Other	3.2%

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Table 10: Population of the Nelson Public Library service area who identify as Indigenous (%), by response type, 2021

Indigenous Identity	Population (%)
First Nations	2.4%
Métis	3.0%
Inuk	0.0%
Multiple Indigenous responses	0.1%
Indigenous responses not included elsewhere	0.0%

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

IMMIGRANT STATUS

Table 11: Population of the Nelson Public service area by immigrant status (%), 2021

Immigrant Status	Population (%)
Non immigrants	85%
Immigrants ⁴	13%
Non-permanent residents	2%

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

³ "Other" languages include non-official languages as well as multiple languages spoken at home (e.g., speaking both English and French, English and a non-official language, etc.).

⁴ For the 2021 Census of Population, "immigrant" refers to individuals who are landed immigrants, permanent residents, or naturalized citizens admitted to Canada by May 2021. "Non-permanent resident" refers to individuals from other countries who are residing in Canada with work or study permits, or who have claimed refugee status (Statistics Canada, 2022).

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Table 12: Population of the Nelson Public Library service area by highest level of educational attainment (%), 2021

Educational Attainment	Population (%)
No certificate, diploma or degree	11.5%
High (secondary) school diploma or equivalency certificate	27.1%
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	9.5%
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	21.0%
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	3.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher	27.7%

(Statistics Canada, 2023a)

Patron Profile

SERVICE POPULATION

Table 13: Total estimated service population of the Nelson Public Library, 2022

Total Estimated Service Population (2023)
21,459

(BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a)

CARDHOLDER LOCATION

Table 14: All cardholders of the Nelson Public Library (# and % of population), March 2024

Area	Number of Cardholders (March 2024)	% of Population (2021 Census)
Nelson	7,314	65.9%
Central Kootenay E	787	20.2%
Central Kootenay F	1,693	41.1%
Central Kootenay H South	1,074	25.3%
Other	116	n/a

(L. Harris, personal communication, April 10, 2024)

CARDHOLDERS BY AGE

Table 15: Cardholders of the Nelson Public Library by age (#), March 2024

Age	Number of Cardholders (March 2024)
Adult	6,441
Juvenile	1,017

(L. Harris, personal communication, April 10, 2024)

Services Provided and Levels of Use

SERVICE INVENTORY

- Collections
 - Books
 - e-books, audio books, online newspapers & magazines
 - Streaming video services
 - Library of Things
 - Including sustainable items (food security collection, home maintenance collection, etc.)
- Programs
 - Children's events
 - Family storytime
 - Book launch and author readings
 - Magic show
 - Summer reading club
 - Reading Link Challenge
 - Crafternoons
 - Book babes
 - Teen events
 - Homework help
 - Bookclubs
 - Artist meet and greet
 - Teen artist exhibit, LVR student art show
 - Teen tech time
 - Storytime and author reading
 - Naloxone training for teens
 - Litter Scavenger Hunt
 - Author events, workshops and special events for adults
 - crafting workshops
 - Cookies and conversation (English language practice)
 - Parent resource nights
 - Senior's outreach
 - Book-a-librarian services
 - Tech Hub workshops
 - Online courses
 - Community presentations about library services
- Technology Access
 - Tech Hub media
 - Digitization station
 - Media station
 - Recording Studio

- Devices to check out (Chromebooks, GoPros)
- Printing Services
- Public computer stations
 - 14 computers available
- Spaces
 - Teen scene area
 - Children’s area downstairs
 - Seating to read, study & work
 - 2 quiet rooms available to book
- Mobile Library
 - RDCK Area H
 - RDCK Area F

SERVICE AND USAGE STATISTICS FOR 2023

Metric	NPL	Average of Other Peer Libraries
Total Active Cardholders	10,891	7,689
Days open per year	299	319
Total Circulation*	231,540	226,013
Total Circulation/service* population	10.8	10.1
Total Circulation/cardholder	21.3	29.4
Volumes Held – All Materials*	135,351	142,500
Volumes Held – Physical Materials	41,524	54,754
Active Program Participants	6,947	9,555
In-Person Library Visits	104,668	120,229
Public Access Workstation Sessions	10,343	6,715
Number of Times Wireless Internet was Used	28,433	35,797

All figures from 2023 except those marked with * which are from 2022 (BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a)

FACILITY

Metric	NPL	Average of Other Peer Libraries
Total sq m	1200	1168
Sq m/service population	0.06	0.05
Total sq m available for public use	800	831
Public seating	62	103
Computers available for public use	14	12

(BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a)

Partnerships

NPL provided the following list of active partnerships to the research team in summer 2024.

Committee Participation

- Nelson Committee on Homelessness
- Nelson At Its Best
- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (Nelson & Slocan Valley)
- Nelson Youth Action Network
- Nelson Child & Youth Services Group
- West Kootenay Local Immigration Partnership

Program Partners/cross promotion

- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (Nelson & Slocan Valley)
- LV Rogers School
- Trafalgar School
- Red Fish School
- Rosemont School
- South Nelson School
- Brent Kennedy School
- Wildflower School
- Nelson & District Arts Council
- Nelson Museum & Archives
- Capital Theatre
- Civic Theatre
- Inter Cultural Kootenays
- United Church
- Kootenay Career Development Society
- Community Futures
- Bigby Place
- Family Place
- Freedom Quest
- Kootenay Boundary Support
- Nelson Cares Kootenay Seniors Program
- Selkirk College – Learning in Retirement
- Nelson Community Food Cupboard
- Nelson & District Youth Centre
- Regional District of the Central Kootenay Slocan Valley Recreation
- Slocan Senior Coffee Time
- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

- City of Nelson: Climate & Energy Department
- Court House Library
- Nelson At Its Best

Consultation

- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy – Nelson & Slocan Valley
- Nelson Committee on Homelessness
- Nelson at its Best
- Nelson Youth Action Network
- Nelson & District Arts Council
- Capital Theatre
- Civic Theatre
- Inter Cultural Kootenays
- Nelson & District Arts Council
- Community Futures
- Nelson Cares Seniors Program
- Learning in Retirement

Regional/Provincial/National

- Kootenay Library Federation – shared programming/services and staff professional development
- BC Library Association – committee participation
- BC Libraries Cooperative – committee participation
- Canadian Library Federation of Associations – committee participation

Grant funders for community projects

- Lions Club
- Nelson Credit Union
- Osprey Foundation
- United Way

Funding in 2023

	Powell River Public Library	Sechelt Public Library	Squamish Public Library	Cranbrook Public Library	Whistler Public Library	Dawson Creek Municipal Public Library	Terrace Public Library	Average of Peers	Nelson Public Library
Service Population	21,835	20,561	25,725	29,976	14,560	20,123	23,578	22,337	19,461
Total Revenue	\$1,886,261.00	\$1,375,803.00	\$2,197,800.00	\$1,426,364.00	\$2,118,570.00	\$906,417.00	\$1,187,906.00	\$1,585,588.71	\$1,380,251.00
Total Revenue/Service Population	\$86.39	\$66.91	\$85.43	\$47.58	\$145.51	\$45.04	\$50.38	\$75.32	\$70.92
Local Government Revenue	\$1,421,838.00	\$948,257.00	\$1,670,150.00	\$894,813.00	\$1,625,037.00	\$522,404.00	\$772,005.00	\$1,122,072.00	\$855,461.00
Municipal	\$987,956.00	\$631,307.00	\$1,615,929.00	\$715,850.00	\$1,609,587.00	\$522,404.00	\$772,005.00	\$979,291.14	\$681,341.00
Regional District	\$433,882.00	\$316,950.00	\$54,221.00	\$178,963.00	\$15,450.00			\$166,577.67	\$174,120.00
Provincial Library Branch Grants	\$387,399.00	\$372,960.00	\$406,003.00	\$419,762.00	\$331,939.00	\$370,157.00	\$393,633.00	\$383,121.86	\$384,761.00
Other Revenue	\$77,024.00	\$54,586.00	\$121,647.00	\$111,789.00	\$161,594.00	\$13,856.00	\$22,268.00	\$80,394.86	\$140,029.00
Local Government Revenue/Service Population	\$65.12	\$46.12	\$64.92	\$29.85	\$111.61	\$25.96	\$32.74	\$53.76	\$43.96
% of Total Revenue from Local Government	75%	69%	76%	63%	77%	58%	65%	69%	62%
% of Total Revenue from Provincial Grants	21%	27%	18%	29%	16%	41%	33%	26%	28%
% of Total Revenue from Other Sources	4%	4%	6%	8%	8%	2%	2%	5%	10%
% of Local Government Revenue from Municipality	69%	67%	97%	80%	99%	100%	100%	87%	80%

% of Local Government Revenue from Regional District	31%	33%	3%	20%	1%	0%		15%	20%
Municipal Population*	13,943	10,847	23,819	20,499	14,053	12,323	12,017	15,357	11,106
Serviced Regional District Population*	6,237	9,531	1,057	6,536		7,633	6,910	6,317	8,355
First Nations Population*	818	744	508	150		396	2,473	848	
Municipal % of Service Population	66%	51%	94%	75%	100%	61%	56%	72%	57%
Regional District % of Service Population	30%	45%	4%	24%	0%	38%	32%	25%	43%
Municipal Revenue/ Municipal Service Population	\$70.86	\$58.20	\$67.84	\$34.92	\$114.54	\$42.39	\$64.24	\$64.71	\$61.35
Regional District Revenue/RD Service Population	\$69.57	\$33.25	\$51.30	\$27.38		\$-	\$-	\$30.25	\$20.84
Total Expenses	\$1,549,440.00	\$1,041,893.00	\$1,876,213.66	\$1,139,252.00	\$1,790,770.00	\$626,415.95	\$923,532.00	\$1,278,216.66	\$965,583.00
Salaries - % of Total Expenses	56%	76%	69%	69%	79%	68%	74%	70%	77%
Library Materials - % of Total Expenses	9%	10%	8%	7%	7%	5%	10%	8%	8%
Computers & Telecommunications - % of Total	3%	2%	1%	6%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%
Facilities - % of Total Expenses	20%	3%	7%	7%	4%	13%	8%	9%	7%

All figures from or calculated from BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024a except those marked *, which are from BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2024b

Appendix 2: Sample Interview Questions

1. Our research has found that [x group] are underrepresented as partners with the Nelson Public Library, meaning that this group doesn't collaborate or partner on mutually beneficial programming. From your perspective, is this finding correct?
2. How do you see [x group] interacting with the library, even if that happens infrequently?
3. What do you see as barriers to collaboration and partnership for [x group]?
4. The mission of the Nelson Public Library is to “inspire a culture of discovery, creativity and connection” and according to their vision statement, NPL aims to be:
 - A gateway to the evolving world of information and technology
 - A catalyst for a strong, literate society
 - A facilitator of strong community connectionsDo you think this mission and vision aligns with [x group]? How so?
5. Keeping the mission of the library in mind, how could [x group] be better supported by the library?
6. One of the potential changes that the library is considering for the future is a new facility. There is a feeling that, given all the important roles the library is playing in the community, they have outgrown the existing site and would benefit with something larger that could serve as a real focal point in the community. So, please imagine the library 30 years from now. What do you think it could look like or offer to [x group]?

Appendix 3: Interviewed Organizations

- Balfour and District Business and Historic Association
- City of Nelson
- Intercultural Kootenays
- Nelson Chamber of Commerce
- Nelson Waldorf School
- Oxygen Art Centre
- RDCK Area E
- Rural Alternatives Research and Training Society
- School District 8
- Selkirk College Student Union
- Selkirk College
- Slovan Valley Community Legacy Society
- Taghum Community Society
- West Kootenay Arts Council

Appendix 4: Staff and Board Engagement - Detailed Results

Question 1. What are the library's successes or things it does well? (Group Discussion)

- Summer program
- Children's area
- Staff going beyond
- Commitment to patrons
- Personal interactions
- Good community relationships
- Making people feel welcome
- Getting books into the hands of readers (not just physical books)
- Catering to folks in all stages of life
- Fabulous leadership
- Good governance (active and supportive board)
- Good at reacting to change, anticipating
- Compassion for vulnerable populations

Question 2. What is your bold idea for a positive future for the library in 20 years? (25/10 Crowdsourcing)

- Hosting a writer's club
- Hosting a book-reading projected at the drive-in
- A branch in Area E because they vote YES
- New, purpose-built, beautiful, energy-efficient, spacious, light-filled facility...with a garden! And a cafe! And room for community gatherings and lots of books
- 30 years from now, the library goes back to its roots- the Civic Centre Old Arena! The innovated redesign sees 3 floors, with 2 floors of meeting areas, rental works rooms, library space, First Nations hub, senior group areas. Top floor-studio apartments with rooftop gardens, and PARKING!
- Outdoor garden space for community garden programs, play area and seating
- EV charging stations
- Community kitchen
- Tool library
- A new facility with 1. outdoor space 2. chat space 3. local art 4. seed library 5. meeting spaces for community groups
- Super community hub with performance space, creative maker space, shared with other organizations and/or housing, climate/eco LEAD building, demonstration gardens, etc.
- Multistorey building with dedicated floor for quiet study
- Children's floor has a playground and mini science museum
- Roof park after we've taken over the police space
- Theatre space 360 degree screen or holographic
- Airy, bright, "climate-friendly" facility with cozy corners, cafe, meeting space, Indigenous teachings apparent

- NPL will be more an urban library, serving growth of community and areas
- Provincial \$ supports us!
- A new building with a roof garden and lots of underground parking with charging stations. Non-library users have to pay (for parking) but if you check out books or use library services it's free
- NPL in 30 years has an amazing and huge facility shared with other stakeholders providing a comprehensive array of public services. Youth center-community center-senior's center.
- 30 years from now our library should be easily accessible in every neighborhood and community. It will also have an amazing central location with a jazzy cafe.
- The Large new library is as essential to community life- the town square- and houses a complete range of social services as well. Cross training provides guidance to all services to all who enter the building
- Library of Things expand so it is as big a collection as the books. (Useful, artful, practical things so people don't have to buy as much)

Question 3. What are the “no brainer” elements of a future vision? (Group Discussion)

- In-person space for people to come together
- A place where people can access accurate information
- Specific programming aimed at 18-30 age group
- Public phone
- Separate spaces
- State of the art space
- Climate friendly/ resilient space
- Flexible space – adaptable to different activities
- Convivial spaces
- All feel welcome and safe
- Library has strong relationships with organizations and individuals
- Relationships break down barriers and polarization
- Men's shed (library of things + men's meeting space)
- People accessing new tools/equipment
- Literary lodges

Question 4. What actions would help the library move forward in achieving this ideal future? (Small Group Discussions)

- Purpose built space with space for collabs with social services
- Advocacy at all levels – money, resources
- Tourism-guest book
- Credibility of the library
- Everyone feels safe and welcome- social worker on staff- food, clothing
- Space-comfortable-money
- Expansive collection and library of things- space and money
- Accessible
- E-bike rentals
- Community gathering space for groups that don't feel welcome, eg men

- Rentable venue-creative funding source
- Purpose built building
- Collaboration with other groups
- Advocacy for resources
- Marketing expertise –publications,
- City council and RDCK- personalized tours
- Coworking spaces
- Guest/visitor data
- Increase philanthropy
- Involved with other groups
- Single speed dating + seniors
- Theatre + discussion
- Equipment rental
- Area E: win them over
- Ages 18-30: bring them in
- Single speed dating
- More equipment rentals
- Bringing in Area E
- Single speed dating to bring 18-30 year olds
- Senior speed dating
- Car repair instructor
- Tool loans
- Tourism – free library pass, making one card
- Build relationships- create understanding of credibility – value of library as equal as police/fire/hospital
- Continue staff professional development around library trends/ well being
- Adapting/ being reactive and proactive
- Pilot- space zones (quiet/group/etc), extended hours
- City of Nelson funding for climate protected space
- Money from philanthropy, sponsorship, corporate sponsorships – issue of donor fatigue
- PR –What We Do
- Trivia night- liaison with- bringing in more community experts
- Community partnerships

Question 5. What resources are needed to implement these actions? (Small Group Discussion)

- Purpose built space
- New eyes to rearrange
- Money
- Partner with people who have space (food center for kitchen)
- Extend hours- more staff
- Flex space or flex staff schedule to share office space
- Staff-shared with other occupants of shiny new building (finance, marketing)
- Organizations that are in the same boat (need more space and resources) and share values with library
- Revenue sources- rentable spaces, equipment/ tech

- Business collab/ synergy
- Mobile shelving upstairs
- More pilot spaces/ mixing up design
- Staff and money
- Support of local government and community
- Money
- New facility
- Making a bigger community presence
- Pub night, capitol theatre
- Help with visibility
- Reach out to groups not represented
- Resources- partners in community to host
- Good to go to places to others in
- Museum/capitol/arena
- Community events in Winlaw, etc
- Museum has a display/ bring in literature
- Story time at Saturday market
- No kitchen- reaching capacity on library of things
- Community spaces for storage
- Build relationships
- Credibility on par with hospital, fire
- Support of local
- Reframing our relationships what do they need that we can support
- Space extended library of things
- Money
- Marketing
- Data
- Fundraiser: murder in the library
- Seniors/facility
- Library is a human right
- Money
- Marketing expertise
- Data to show who uses the library
- Connections-what we do
- Games nights- special interest groups
- Fundraising
- Data collection
- Each staff/ board member
- Marketing/fundraiser events- untraditional, murder mystery night
- Passive programming – games night/day, repair cafe
- Area H/F social media
- Staff outreach new partnership
- Reach comm influences- demonstrate credibility, value
- Provincial campaign for increased funding
- Campaign local government to advocate
- Human right to have an accessible space

- Rely on community protocol- prioritize relationships, place to make people feel connected – social worker present in the library –street outreach
- Tap into other people’s space and things for Library of Things

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