

Q1|2020

The Seattle Public Library LEVY REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hitting the ground running, then a pandemic

The Library levy measure approved by Seattle voters in August 2019 provided a clear framework for how the public investment would be used to restore, maintain and improve Library services. This report, which covers activities and spending for the first quarter of 2020, continues the series of updates for the Library's Leadership Team and Library Board of Trustees established with the 2012 levy to document implementation of levy priorities and accomplishments.

Last August, Seattle voters overwhelmingly approved a seven-year \$219.1 million property tax increase to maintain and enhance Library services through 2026. Enhancements include: additional Library hours; elimination of overdue fines; improved collections; more investment in technology; safer, cleaner buildings; and additional programming and services for children and high-needs communities. Many of these enhancements came out of priorities identified through a 2018 community survey that assessed public satisfaction with existing Library programs and services and gauged interest in potential new service offerings.

As 2020 began, after much preparation, we hit the ground running on implementing new Library services funded by the levy. By the end of the first week of January, we had already fulfilled two key voter promises that were centered on equity: Eliminating overdue fines and adding an hour of Library service at each location on Sunday.

By March, however, the Library was forced to make an unprecedented pivot in response to an emergent global pandemic. At the end of February, the first signs of community spread of COVID-19 in our region surfaced. In early March, the Library, working closely with the city to make decisions, suspended all programs, events and meeting room use. Shortly thereafter, the Mayor closed all Library facilities. Our last day of operation was March 13, 2020; as of this writing the Library's physical locations still remain closed (except for restroom services provided at five branches).

In the weeks since our physical locations closed, with most Library staff working remotely, we quickly began regrouping to transform the way we do business and how we serve our community. 2019 levy funding has been critical to our ability to find new and creative ways to provide Library services to

“When access to knowledge is key to a civil society, Seattle’s remarkable library system is an equalizer, sharing and dispensing knowledge and resources to all who pass through its doors, without reservation or judgment.”

– Seattle Times [editorial](#) in support of the levy, August 2019



Seattle residents, from launching an e-card that allows Seattle residents without a Library card to immediately access our digital collections to creating virtual versions of high-impact programs such as story time to reaching our most vulnerable patrons in new ways.

While this report, which covers the first quarter of 2020, only tells the first chapter in that story, it is a preview to how, with Levy support, the Library is continuing to rise to the unprecedented challenge that 2020 has brought to all of us.

This report will focus on how the Library is fulfilling its promises to voters in the core levy program areas — Hours and Access, Collections, Technology and Online Services, Children’s Programming and Maintenance — in a city and world that has changed dramatically since January 1, 2020.

LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: HOURS & ACCESS

Slashing barriers, expanding access and equity

Many of the elements of the 2019 levy were related to expanding access to Library resources and services, always with a goal of slashing barriers and reaching prioritized audiences – communities historically underrepresented in Library audiences. Two of these started the first week of January.

Making overdue fines history

Eight years ago, Seattle resident Tara Migliore lost access to the Library. A new baby and an injury kept her from being able to return books on time. The result was \$60 in late fines that she couldn’t pay.

“As a low-income mom using the food bank to survive, I just didn’t have the money,” she said. So she let her account lapse. But on January 2, 2020, Migliore, along with 51,000 other Seattle residents, got a fresh start to the new year. On that date, the Library, because of the 2019 levy, joined more than 50 libraries across the country in eliminating overdue fines and clearing past late fines from all patron accounts.

Migliore, who spoke at a press conference celebrating the change, along with Mayor Jenny Durkan, was just one of many overjoyed patrons that Library staff heard from in the early days of 2020. Others included a formerly homeless man who had been a daily visitor at the Queen Anne branch for years without ever checking out materials; a patron of the Hunger Intervention Program whose access had been blocked; and a mother who summed up the impact of this change for her kids in a few words: “It’s like winning



"As a low-income mom using the food bank to survive, I just didn't have the money."

– Patron Tara Migliore about losing access to the Library due to overdue fines

the lottery! You know, this sounds like a small thing, but it is a BIG thing.”

Our patrons’ positive experiences with this huge change was the result of months of careful planning. After the successful vote in August, the Library formed a special task force with representatives from all over the Library system.

This task force was charged with figuring out how we would implement this change, communicate to patrons in way that would help them successfully navigate a fine-free Library system, and how we would track our success. As part of the process, we collaborated with the City’s Innovation and Performance team to interview patrons about their experiences with borrowing materials, returning them and fines. These findings helped us shape our communications approach as well as the cadence of our reminders to patrons, our marketing campaign and more.

The sudden shutdown of our physical Library locations — and the related pause on lending physical materials — have interrupted our ability to track the impacts of this change. One positive sign: Early results indicate that we have reduced the percentage of patrons with suspended accounts from 10% in 2019 to only 6% at the beginning of March 2020, restoring borrowing privileges to thousands of Seattle residents.

Adding Sunday hours

Another Levy-funded change that started in early January was that each of our 26 branch locations opened one hour earlier on Sundays. This change provides more access to the internet and other services on a day that is popular with families, especially in our southeast branches where patrons are more likely to say they rely on the library for Wi-Fi and computer access.

This was the first step in a planned addition of more than 10,000 new Library hours annually funded by the levy. With our continued closure and much to figure out about how we safely reopen in this new socially distanced world, we have delayed our planned June launch of additional open hours at branches throughout the system.

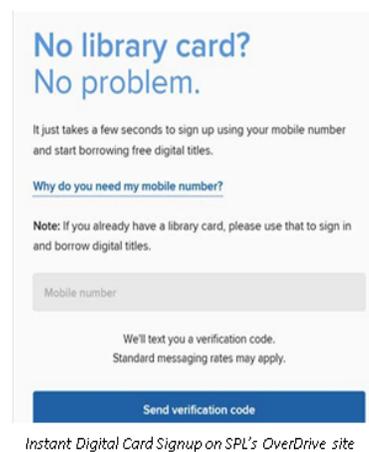
COVID-19 pivots

Adding an e-card in March

On Friday, March 13, the last day the Library was open before the COVID-related closure, we set a record for physical checkouts; over 12,000 patrons checked out over 100,000 items. This was more than eight times the number of checkouts on an average Friday. We also made changes to our checkout policies, extending all due dates past the closure period, and letting patrons whose accounts had a temporary suspension (not a lost item) continue to access digital resources

But after we closed our doors, we had an immediate problem to solve: How could we open our digital doors to Seattle residents who did not already have a Library card?

In the past, we required patrons to make an in-person visit to get a new Library card. This allowed us to verify identities and eligibility



and provide an introduction to our services. During our closure, we needed a quick and easy way to provide Library cards to users that would still take these steps but did not require a visit to a library building.

We worked with our e-book vendor, OverDrive, to enable their Instant Digital Card service, which allows patrons to sign up for a Library card using a mobile phone and get instant access to OverDrive resources. We were able to implement this service starting on March 26, 2020, just 13 days after our closure.

Within the first two weeks of the sign-up, more than 3,300 patrons had signed up for an Instant Digital Library card, with 2,200 of these new to the Library system. Library staff are now able to review every registration and merge duplicate accounts to ensure we are counting each user only once in our database.

For comparison, we added about 2,100 new borrowers to our system during an average two-week period in 2019, so we are adding about the same number of new borrowers each week as we did last year when our facilities were open, boosting our total number of active borrowers (patrons who have used their library card in the last three years) to over 396,000.

In the first quarter, we also began the process of expanding our “LibraryLink” digital access program, a collaboration with Seattle Public Schools, to include all public school students and teachers in Seattle. This was completed in May.

Online programming and services

In early March, the Library suspended all on-site programs in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. With help from our Information Technology team, which built up telework capacity, Library staff have worked hard to respond to changing circumstances and transform or start virtual services and programs that meet the rapidly changing needs of our patrons.

After we suspended in-person programming, for example, we were able to host two virtual semi-finals rounds of the Global Reading Challenge before the Seattle School District closed all schools. After our locations closed, we worked quickly to restore core information services, such as chat and email, and redirected our marketing and online presence to highlight digital resources, collections and book discovery. We also launched virtual story times for children and families through Facebook Live.

As the quarter ended, we were in the midst of planning how we would continue to ensure access for our patrons to as many Library services and programs as possible while our doors are closed.



LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: COLLECTIONS

Building robust collections in print and digital formats

The 2019 levy commits resources to maintaining and expanding the Library's collection of physical and digital materials. The levy includes additional funding for e-books, audiobooks and streaming services; money to continue and expand the Peak Picks collection; and funds to support the acquisition and digitization of local history items.

More materials in formats patrons prefer

For the first 10 weeks of the year, we saw strong physical circulation as we continued to expand our Peak Picks no-holds no-wait collection, adding over 5,000 copies of 25 new titles. Beginning with February releases, in response to the popularity of the program, we increased the quantity we ordered for each Peak Pick title from 195 to 207. By the time we closed at the end of the day on March 13, only 535 of the available copies of Peak Picks books were left on the shelf, and nearly 10,000 were checked out to patrons for a 95% usage rate.

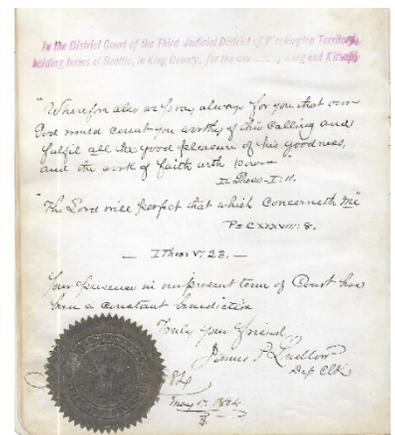
We also expanded the depth and breadth of our general collections by purchasing more than 7,700 new titles through the first quarter of 2020.



Making Seattle history more accessible

We added over 300 new photographs and pieces of ephemera to our Jack Large Photograph Collection which includes images from Seattle and the surrounding area from the late 1960s. Photographs include images of I-5 construction, Pioneer Square street scenes, Pike Place Market and aerial views of downtown Seattle from the Smith Tower.

One key acquisition: Our Seattle Collection curator purchased a decorative hardcover autograph album belonging to Rosamond Densmore, a member of the first group of women jurors in Washington Territory in 1884. Women were allowed to vote and serve on juries in Washington Territory in the 1880s, but those rights were rescinded until statehood in 1912. Densmore served on a jury again in 1912. This album, which includes signatures and handwritten sentiments collected by Densmore during her jury service in 1884 and 1912, provides a unique look into the history of women's rights in Washington.



Autograph album inscription by James P. Ludlow, 3rd District Court Deputy Clerk in Seattle, to juror Rosamond Densmore, 1884

Library Special Collections staff has focused on online services and research work during our physical closure: fulfilling patron requests for images from digital collections; answering reference questions submitted via chat and email; and working on metadata for upcoming additions to the Werner Lenggenhager Photograph Collection.

COVID-19 pivot: Digital materials lead the way

Since our locations closed, not surprisingly, we've experienced an increase in demand for all digital materials as our newly homebound patrons check out materials for education, entertainment, skill-building and much more.

Digital checkouts booming

The pandemic accelerated the long-term trend of patrons' shift from physical to digital materials. In the first-quarter checkouts of adult e-books increased by 14% over the first quarter 2019; and checkouts of children's e-books increased by 38%, with most of the increase occurring in March. Three of the Library's four streaming services – Kanopy, Freegal and Access Video – showed increases from the first quarter of 2019 to the first quarter of 2020.

This increase in use of electronic materials comes at a price. One week after our buildings closed, the high-demand order doubled from the week before; for kids' titles, demand increased fourfold. The term "high demand" means the number of copies we purchase to reduce wait times to target levels for titles already purchased. Before the closure, we spent an average of about \$35,000 to meet high demand each week. By comparison, in the last week of March, we spent \$50,000. We have reprogrammed some levy funds to support increased expenditures in e-materials.

At the same time, our vendors have relaxed some of their licensing arrangements in light of COVID-19. Macmillan rolled back their eight-week embargo on newly published items and have made their e-titles available for libraries to purchase on the publication date, and Penguin Random House has temporarily offered more licensing options. With our ability to increase purchasing of e-materials and more flexible licensing from e-book publishers, the Library has been able to expand and adapt its e-material collection and policies to meet growing demand.

The power of a database

Overall use of the Library's online databases, including Flipster and New York Times Digital, increased 9% in the first quarter of 2020, when compared to 2019. Remote access increased 14% over the same time frame. Several of our database vendors, which previously only allowed in-Library use of their databases, have provided remote access to our patrons during the COVID-19 closure.

One example of how access to such databases can have powerful ripple effects was recently shared by Elizabeth Kennedy, who is project manager for Building Our Bridge, a project created by Seattle Housing Authority residents. In the fall of 2019, Elizabeth had a one-on-one appointment with a member of the Library to Business team to learn how to use Foundation Directory Online (FDO). For background, FDO is the most comprehensive database of grant funding available, invaluable not just for identifying prospective grant funders, but also for making connections with other small nonprofits. That's one of the ways Elizabeth used it, to network with other groups working on digital equity and with immigrant/refugee communities.

“Excellent work during the pandemic, Seattle library. I am reading up a storm!”

– Library patron, via
Bibliocommons

As she told the Library, this “led to informal partnerships with Refugee Women’s Alliance, the Ethiopian community in Seattle and Asian Counseling & Referral Services.” During the COVID-19 crisis, they have been able to use connections first identified by FDO to offer technology education and access to community meetings on medical issues, unemployment and finding jobs. “As low-income tenants of public housing, we greatly appreciate the growth we’ve experienced as a result of free access to the Foundation Directory at the Seattle Public Library,” she said. During the COVID-19 crisis, like many of our databases, FDO is being offered for remote use, increasing its potential reach.

Digital promotion

Since we closed, much of our marketing and communications work has been directed to promoting and helping our patrons discover our digital services, through social media, the website, reference questions, press outreach and more. We have also added staff capacity for fulfilling Your Next Skill and Your Next Five requests, and for driving discovery through ShelfTalk blogposts and OverDrive booklists.

LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Technology and Online Services

Keeping our technology up to date

The 2019 levy promises around technology include replacing infrastructure for public internet access; replacing outdated technology for acquisition and circulation; dedicated funding for digital equity offerings; and maintaining/upgrading public technologies and the spl.org website.

Replacing hardware and software

We began the year continuing our efforts to modernize Library technology for both staff and patrons by focusing on our in-building resources. We started migrating staff to Windows10 and Office 2016, matching work done for public computers in 2019. We also deployed assistive listening kits for each Library branch, making all branch meeting room monitors fully ADA compliant. Staff planned for, acquired and/or implemented critical technology infrastructure to improve our self-service checkout systems and our Wi-Fi connectivity.

Behind the scenes, our technology staff also played a leading role in in a complex effort to modify the Library systems necessary to eliminate overdue fines, as well as implementing a text-messaging reminder option that helps patrons remember to return materials in a fine-free environment.

Sustaining the HotSpot circulation program

The Seattle Public Library was one of the first library systems in the nation to allow patrons to “borrow the internet” by checking out Wi-Fi hot spots through the SPL HotSpot program, launched in 2015. In the first quarter of this year, the HotSpot loan program had an inventory of 925 hot spots – 675 available to any Library cardholder for 21 days, and 250 loaned on a long-term basis to communities in need, such as tiny home villages. This program is now largely funded by the levy. When the Library closed its physical locations, the checkout period for hot spots in circulation was extended until the Library reopens. Recognizing that access to the Internet is essential during this public health crisis, the Library began working with partners on loaning additional hot spots on a long-term basis.

“[Hot spots] return a sense of normalcy and dignity at this time.”

– Andrew Constantino, site coordinator at Georgetown Village

Andrew Constantino, site coordinator and former resident of Georgetown Village, highlighted the importance of internet connection for insecurely housed people. "Having the hot spots at the villages is especially important now. They allow residents to stay in contact with family members and friends, stay informed about the crisis, and not feel isolated and alone. They return a sense of normalcy and dignity during this time."

COVID-19 pivot: A remote workforce, an essential website

As the Library made drastic changes to operations as part of the community response to halt the spread of COVID-19, technology staff had to quickly shift resources to enable remote connectivity and telework for Library staff. By the end of March, over 500 staff had some form of connectivity to the Library network for work, training and the development of virtual services to the public.

Our technology staff temporarily recalled, reimaged and deployed over 130 patron laptops for staff. They also helped set up other Library staff for widespread video conferencing with both coworkers and patrons, developing core skill sets necessary for transforming patron services and reaching a newly homebound population.

During this unprecedented time, our quickly evolving communications played a role in modeling crisis communications for other Library systems that were watching us navigate from the original epicenter of the pandemic. We informally collaborated with Western Washington library systems, participated in a [webinar](#) in mid-March about navigating COVID-19, and thoughtfully answered queries posed by other Library systems

"I wanted to thank you for leading the way with crisis communications during this unusual time."

- Promotions manager at an Illinois library

LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Programming for Children

Expanding early learning options for children ages 0-5

Planned programs delayed, virtual programs launched

In the area of children's programming, the 2019 Levy promises additional support for Library early learning programs for children ages 0 to 5. These programs were originally slated to start in June, but have been delayed due to COVID-19 closures.

However, starting in late March, we did adapt some of our most impactful children's programs into online programs, and continued to do so in the second quarter. Our beloved children's librarians have converted our well-attended in-branch story times to virtual story times on our Facebook channel, and now host up to four live-stream story times a week, which are getting thousands of views and many positive comments from viewers. We are working on recording and making available more of our popular world-language story times. We are also offering virtual Play and Learn groups.



LEVY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Maintenance

Protecting our investments

The 2019 Levy promised to maintain Library buildings, preserve funding for major maintenance and add resources to undertake earthquake retrofit for [historic Columbia, Green Lake and University branches](#).

Routine maintenance: Keeping our facilities clean and safe

The maintenance of our facilities might not make headlines, but it is essential for maintaining a clean, safe, accessible environment. In the first quarter, we cleaned all the interior windows at the Central Library – using the same technique we use for our exterior windows. This effort requires rock climbing gear and rappelling from above; it was the first time the interior windows have been cleaned since opening the building in 2005.

At the branches, about half of windows were cleaned before we closed, and all branches had their floors and upholstery cleaned. Routine maintenance on the elevators and HVAC systems were completed.



Major maintenance: Preserving our facilities for the next generation

In 2020, the levy provides \$3.7 million in budget authority for major maintenance, with an additional \$500,000 for seismic retrofit planning at the Green Lake Branch, one of the original Carnegie libraries. The Green Lake branch is a popular neighborhood destination.

Unfortunately, COVID-related closures and restrictions have complicated and slowed this work, with some contractors temporarily suspending their operations and others continuing while employing social distancing and other health-related measures. Continuing major projects in the first quarter included restoration of windows at the Queen Anne branch; HVAC system replacement at Beacon Hill Branch; lighting control upgrades at the Central Library; roof moisture intrusion assessment at both Lake City and Queen Anne branches. It also included planning and design for the Green Lake Branch (seismic), the Maintenance and Operations Center (multiple systems and layout), Douglass-Truth Branch (exterior access) and Central Library (Fourth Avenue Berm lighting/landscaping, parking garage door replacement and freight elevator).

COVID-19 pivot: Gearing up for reopening and providing safe restrooms

Since our Library locations have been closed, the building maintenance workers have focused on work that is challenging to do when patrons are in the buildings. They have epoxied all staff restroom floors at the Central Library and painted all of the door jams. They have also used this time to pressure wash exterior surfaces and restriped parking lots at branches.

At the City's request, in late April, the Library reopened restrooms at five branches and the Central Library to support insecurely housed patrons lacking restroom options during the COVID-19 pandemic. In preparation for offering this service, the Library established protocols for cleaning facilities in accordance with Public Health – Seattle & King County's guidelines to protect our patrons and staff. On a daily basis, restrooms receive an overnight deep clean. Custodial/janitorial staff will also clean touch points at least twice a day and more often based on usage. Our custodial/janitorial staff will be equipped with PPE such as surgical or N-95 masks, depending on the type of cleaning being done; sleeved aprons; eye protection; and gloves.

Looking Forward:

As you'll read in our next levy report, our staff continued to adapt, enhance, and launch services and programs to help our community respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Here's a quick preview:

- Instant digital card upgraded to full access e-card
 - Library Link for Seattle Public Schools
 - More Wi-Fi HotSpots for vulnerable communities
 - Your Next Job and other services for job seekers and entrepreneurs
 - Virtual Summer of Learning and other collaborations with Seattle Public Schools
 - #SeattleTogether partnership
 - Reopening restrooms at five locations
 - Reopening planning begins
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Q1- Financials

2019 Levy Fund	Revised Budget	YTD Exp	Available	% Spent
Hours & Access	10,944,593	2,401,436	8,543,157	22%
Providing Books & Materials	5,355,251	1,043,981	4,311,270	19%
Technology & Online Services	2,677,063	296,581	2,380,482	11%
Children's Programming	405,000	-	405,000	0%
Building & Facility Support	1,783,696	290,023	1,493,674	16%
Administration	530,397	68,261	462,136	13%
CIP	4,190,000	201,147	3,988,853	5%
Total	\$ 25,886,000	\$ 4,301,428	\$ 21,584,572	17%

2012 Levy Fund	Revised Budget*	YTD Exp	Available
Hours & Access	-	217,149	(217,149)
Collection	-	699	(699)
Technology & Online Services	58,602	-	58,602
Routine Maintenance	11,207	15,509	(4,301)
Administration	-	0	(0)
CIP	-	(19,573)	19,573
Total	\$ 69,810	\$ 213,783	\$ (143,974)

**Does not include carryover budget authority which will be reflected in the second quarter. Hours and Access expenses include 2019 COLA that was paid out in 2020.*