

North Shore libraries launch lendable laptop programs

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Categories: [Library news](#)

Government grant helps fund new technology access initiative

North Shore libraries are rolling out brand new lendable laptops for residents across the region thanks to a grant from the Government of Canada's Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF), the Province of British Columbia and the West Vancouver Foundation.

Beginning March 18, cardholders at North Vancouver City Library and West Vancouver Memorial Library will be able to borrow from a collection of nearly 50 new Chromebooks — laptops that utilize Google's Chrome operating system. The North Vancouver District Public Library will introduce 25 Windows laptops and e-reading devices for loan in April.

"Public libraries are valuable community hubs and this is a great use of funding that will provide important digital connections for seniors, families and individuals in the community," said Josie Osborne, Minister of Municipal Affairs. "This lendable laptop program opens up a world of possibilities with a library card — including connecting people with loved ones, online learning programs, and digital access to vital health and safety information for people on the North Shore."

COVID-19 has drawn attention to the existing and growing digital divide in our community. Research conducted by North Shore libraries indicates that 10-15% of the North Shore's population does not have home access to technology.

"The pandemic has shone a bright spotlight on how access to technology — or lack thereof — impacts the way that people connect with information, services, and each other. The new

Chromebook lending program at North Vancouver City Library and West Vancouver Memorial Library

Page 1 - <https://www.nvcl.ca/news/north-shore-libraries-launch-lendable-laptop-programs> | Accessed: May 19, 2024 - 05:45 PM

is another fantastic example of how modern-day libraries continue to evolve to meet the needs of people in our communities,” Bowinn Ma, North Vancouver-Lonsdale MLA said.

As work, schooling and services increasingly move online, more members of the community are impacted.

“We’re hearing from families needing to accommodate multiple people learning and working remotely, elders isolated at home unable to connect with friends and family, and people who are struggling to access critical support services,” Deb Hutchison Koep, NVCL Chief Librarian said. “It is gutting to see how quickly so many people can be left behind — a large part of our libraries’ mission is to help alleviate access barriers.”

Those who do not own personal technology or who cannot afford data plans or internet access find themselves effectively cut off from critical services and social connections.

This situation spurred the three libraries into action together.

“We know many people across the North Shore enjoy the services of all three library systems,” Jacqueline van Dyk, Director of Library Services at the North Vancouver District Public Library said. “Working in sync on initiatives that cross municipal borders ensures that every North Shore resident has access to essential resources and technology — and particularly during the pandemic, the need for equitable access to technology has only intensified.”

WVML Director Stephanie Hall added, “We’re so grateful to the Province for this funding for technology initiatives, and to the West Vancouver Foundation and ECSF program for doubling its impact, enabling us to get more laptops to more community members. Later this year, we hope to add portable Wi-Fi hotspots to our collection, too.”

In March 2020, the Province provided \$3 million in one-time funding to public libraries and partner organizations to invest in technological upgrades, electronic collections, online programs and other digital initiatives. This project is supported by the Government of Canada’s Emergency Community Support Fund, the Province of British Columbia and the West Vancouver Foundation.