Public Libraries Respond to COVID-19

SURVEY OF RESPONSE & ACTIVITIES
RESULTS COLLECTED MARCH 24–APRIL 1, 2020
SURVEY METHOD

Conducted March 24–April 1, 2020, by the Public Library Association (PLA), in partnership with other Public Library Data Alliance members

SURVEY
Hosted in Survey Monkey; 17 questions total, including contact information

DISTRIBUTION
Survey link distributed via email, social media and public library listservs

SAMPLE
Public library directors or their designees responding on behalf of their library system

ANALYTICS
Data were cleaned, de-duplicated, and anonymized
SURVEY RESULTS

The results in this report represent aggregate responses from a convenience survey.

**RESPONDENTS**
- 2,545 public libraries

**RESPONSE RATE**
- 28% of US public library systems

**STATES**
- 50 US states + Washington, DC with at least 1 response
- 43 states with more than 10% of public libraries responding

**LEGAL SERVICE AREA POPULATION***
- 44% serve <10k
- 23% serve 10k-24,999
- 23% serve 25k-99,999
- 10% serve >100k

*Unless otherwise noted, n=2,545 when calculating responses.
**Public library system is equivalent to a public library jurisdiction.
***Legal Service Area Population for all US public libraries: 57% serve <10k; 19% serve 10k–24,999; 17% serve 25k–99,999; and 7% serve >100k.
(From the FY2017 Public Libraries Survey, Institute of Museum and Library Services)
1% of respondents reported that their library is still open to the public, and less than 1% reported that their library is mostly closed to the public with some exceptions.

*Status of closures continues to change based on state and local shelter-in-place orders. Because data are rounded and the lowest response categories are removed, data may not sum to 100%.
Extending online renewal policies 76%
Expanding online check-out services 74%
Adding virtual programming 61%
Expanding online virtual reference/help 41%
Expanding phone reference/help 38%
Making curbside pick-up available* 22%
Delivering collection items to patrons* 6%

*Status of handling and distributing physical materials also continues to shift. Related guidance is here: www.ala.org/tools/atoz/pandemic-preparedness.

“We have issued 418 library cards in 3 weeks (since we closed)! Customers can apply on our website, and their barcode number will be emailed to them. We are adding several hundred e-books and e-audiobooks per week. We fully expect our digital collection to receive heavy use.”
- Central Rappahannock Regional Library (Fredericksburg, VA)
Providing non-COVID online resources (activities to do at home, unemployment resources)

Expanding access to services (e-cards, deaf/blind/disabled expanded options, fine forgiveness, upping checkout limits, providing online assistance, setting up a helpline)

Distributing library materials (free craft supplies, kits for various activities such as games and STEM, mailing items)

Providing resources related to COVID (online and physically posted)

Providing technology (laptop and hotspot checkout, expanding wifi, print/scan/copy/fax services)

Using makerspace equipment to create medical supplies

Creating virtual exhibits/programs

Reallocating staff/resources (staff to other government entities for support, allowing other entities to use library meeting space)

Supporting distance learning (materials, internet access, resources)

Coordinating distribution of emergency supplies (distribution of masks for hospitals, first aid supplies for community, meals)

“We have a large 3D print lab, and our lead volunteer is working with the El Dorado Community Foundation to use our printers to print face shields for our local regional hospitals and county facilities.”
- El Dorado County Library (El Dorado Hills, CA)

Percentages sum to more than 100% because responses may address multiple topics.
PROVIDING PUBLIC INTERNET ACCESS

LEAVING ON PUBLIC WIFI WHEN THE BUILDING IS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC

- 81% of libraries offered this as a service prior to COVID-19 and continue to do so during this time
- 12% of libraries expanded or added this service in response to COVID-19

LOCATING WIFI ACCESS POINTS TO IMPROVE ACCESS OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDING

- 36% of libraries offered this as a service prior to COVID-19 and continue to do so during this time
- 8% of libraries expanded or added this service in response to COVID-19

CHECKING OUT HOTSPOTS

- 21% of libraries offered this as a service prior to COVID-19 and continue to do so during this time
- 2% of libraries expanded or added this service in response to COVID-19

Because data are rounded and the lowest response categories are removed, data may not sum to 100%.
COMMUNICATION

THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS ARE UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATIONS, INCLUDING:

- **95%** To share changes in library services
- **89%** To promote library services
- **74%** To share COVID-19 information
- **62%** To promote participation in the 2020 Census
PUBLIC LIBRARY STAFF

**STAFF BY TYPE**

- Full Time MLIS: 17%
- Full Time Non-MLIS: 32%
- Part Time: 42%
- Temp/Other: 9%

**WORK FROM HOME POLICY**

- Yes: 70%
- Undecided: 18%
- No: 10%

THE MAJORITY OF STAFF REPORTED TO BE **NOT WORKING** ARE STILL BEING PAID A SALARY OR HOURLY WAGE

Depending on staff type, between 1% and 5% were taking vacation or sick leave. Respondents were more likely to report that part-time and temporary staff were not being paid as compared with the other staff types (10% and 7% respectively, vs. 1% each for full time MLIS and non-MLIS staff).

MLIS = Master’s in Library and Information Science
NEW & EXPANDED SERVICES
Continuing to offer new virtual programs and outreach/remote services developed in response to COVID-19

HEALTH & SAFETY
Implementing library policies and practices for social distancing and materials sanitation

PHASED REOPENING
Prioritizing staff return, materials, and programs and services to open in phases

“We are introducing many services which will likely become permanent when we are open again. We have really been heartened by the response to virtual storytimes, read-alouds and cooking demos.
- McArthur Public Library (Biddeford, ME)

“We developed a very detailed procedure for handling books, materials and money to keep both staff and public safe.
- Bertha Bartlett Public Library (Story City, IA)

“We are hoping for a soft opening, allowing full staff to return to work before we are open to the public. This will allow staff space to emotionally process what we have just experienced and begin to get caught up on tasks before we jump back into face-to-face services.
- Carnegie Public Library (Washington Court House, OH)
## Libraries' Greatest Needs

### Open-Ended Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Health &amp; Safety</th>
<th>Online Access</th>
<th>Patron Services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure funding for pre-crisis budgets, including staff salaries and new funding for response work</td>
<td>Obtain cleaning supplies and protective wear for staff, and rebuild trust in the community that the library is safe</td>
<td>Expand e-services to patrons, especially those with limited internet access</td>
<td>Meet anticipated higher demand for services for those most impacted by the crisis</td>
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*Funding*

- Funding will drop because of decreased tax revenue. I think funding will be the most important need.
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*Health & Safety*

- We need to know when to reopen, how to safely reopen, and how to clean our collections.
  - Bedford (TX) Public Library

*Online Access*

- We are trying to get hotspots available for our community but they are at a premium at the moment. Helping our patrons stay informed and providing access to the internet are key in rural areas.
  - William B. Harlan Memorial Library (Tompkinsville, KY)

*Patron Services*

- I foresee libraries needing professionals that can help with filing paperwork necessary for resident recompense, job searching/application, unemployment, benefits/401k, and other issues that arise.
  - Carroll County Library (Huntingdon, TN)

\(^*n=1,431\)
## ADVOCACY NEEDS FROM STATE & NATIONAL ORGS.

### OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES*

### COMMUNICATING VALUE
Continued/increased advocacy about the value of libraries during the crisis and the essential roles they will play in recovery

### FUNDING
Active efforts to protect, restore or expand library funding during the recovery process, as well as support for paying staff during building closures

### GUIDANCE
Clear guidance and training for developing or expanding pandemic, emergency and sanitation policies

### GET THE WORD OUT
- Get the word out that libraries are still here and virtually open...We need to toot our own horns!
  - Grimes (IA) Public Library

### WE WILL NEED STATE AND FEDERAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT
- We will need state and federal financial support since local governments will have very strapped budgets due to a huge decrease in tax revenue.
  - Central Rappahannock Regional Library (Fredericksburg, VA)

### KEEP sending out information
- Keep sending out information, access to webinars on a variety of topics, and best practices you are seeing.
  - Laramie County Library System (Cheyenne, WY)

*p=1,181*
Acknowledgments

PUBLIC LIBRARIES RESPOND TO COVID-19:
SURVEY OF RESPONSE & ACTIVITIES

The Public Library Association (PLA) wants to thank all of the public libraries that responded so quickly to this survey. Your responses are informing work by library organizations like PLA, help advance national policy advocacy for libraries, and increase our shared knowledge across the field and with the media.

PLA would also like to thank the Library Research Service, an office of the Colorado State Library, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services for their work in helping clean and validate the survey data. We would also like to acknowledge the Canadian public libraries that responded to this survey but were excluded from the aggregate results.

PLA plans on distributing a second survey to continue measuring the rapidly-evolving changes happening across the field and to further address the changing needs of our libraries.

To learn more about the survey and view the full set of questions, please visit: www.ala.org/pla/issues/covid-19/surveyoverview.