

COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Library Support for Communities

Background

- According to a survey by the School Library Journal, public libraries have fulfilled a pivotal role in serving communities during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic through a variety of partnerships, including with schools, food banks, local business, and mental health organizations.¹
- This document describes how public libraries are supporting local government partners, healthcare workers and emergency responders by providing access to facilities and internet access to safely continue operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 operations across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute and should not be considered as guidance in any way.²

Key Considerations

- In several states, libraries have expanded library services and repurposed their equipment, staff, and capabilities to support COVID-19-related services for the community, including collecting and supplying personal protective equipment (PPE), increasing information access for individuals without internet, and helping residents apply for unemployment.
- After closing to the public, many libraries have continued to support the safety of essential workers by converting their empty spaces into workstations for emergency managers and police department units to provide enough space to ensure adequate social distancing.

Lessons Learned Related to Library Support for Communities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

¹ 2020 School Library Journal, Answering the Crisis, Public Libraries Collaborate with Schools, Other Organizations to Serve Communities | SLJ COVID-19 Survey, <https://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/?detailStory=answering-the-crisis-public-libraries-collaborate-schools-other-organizations-to-serve-communities-SLJ-COVID-19-survey-coronavirus>

² This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.



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Expanding Library Services

- **Potential Best Practice:** Libraries in some states have used their 3-D printers to create PPE for healthcare workers, first responders, and the general public. Although library buildings were closed as part of the shutdown of nonessential services, library staff can operate the printers from the safety of their homes.³
 - A library in Massachusetts has 3-D printed and distributed over 200 headbands for face shields to social services providers and medical centers with low funding.
 - In North Carolina, a county library has printed parts for face shields for the Durham County Emergency Management.
- **Potential Best Practice:** Libraries across several states have launched efforts to increase accessibility to essential services, such as internet and personal hygiene.⁴
 - In Indiana, a library ensured all their Grow and Google partnership hotspots were checked out to library clients before closing to provide internet access to residents who would have lost their sole connection to the internet from the closure.
 - In South Carolina, a library system has collected and donated 40 hand sanitizing stations to local homeless shelters. The library has also placed additional portable restrooms outside downtown branches.
- **Potential Best Practice:** Libraries have expanded their services to include COVID-19-related support by repurposing book drops and drive-through windows.
 - In Oakland, California, a library repurposed book drops for collecting packaged mask donations.⁴
 - After the closure of the Roanoke County Treasurer's Office, the county library branches opened their drive-through windows for residents to make in-person payments for dog and cat licenses, parking tickets, and personal property and real estate taxes. Treasurer's Office staff have also used these branch locations to provide tax assistance.⁵
 - Public library branches throughout Florida have provided paper unemployment forms via drive-through windows. Library staff then mail out the forms or deliver them directly to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity for free.⁵
- **Potential Best Practice:** Some library staff have supported Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) by conducting research and updating the 2-1-1 call-line information on community resources.⁵

Repurposing Library Spaces

- **Potential Best Practice:** In Anchorage, Alaska, the EOC moved its operations to a public library to provide team members with enough space for individuals and teams to maintain social distancing.⁵

³ 2020 Urban Libraries Council, ULC Libraries Use 3-D Printers to Help Fight COVID-19, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/ulc-libraries-use-3-d-printers-to-help-fight-covid-19>

⁴ 2020 The Atlantic, Public Libraries' Novel Response to a Novel Virus, <https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2020/03/public-libraries-novel-response-to-a-novel-virus/609058/>

⁵ 2020 Urban Libraries Council, Reimagining Library Spaces to Provide Essential Community Services, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/repurposing-library-spaces-to-provide-essential-community-services>

- **Potential Best Practice:** In Dallas, Texas, several public library branches have served as operating centers for the Dallas Police Department to create enough space for proper social distancing, specifically the Criminal Investigation Units and civil support departments.⁵
- **Potential Best Practice:** A California library has left its parking lot open to provide a safe space for individuals without homes to camp in their cars overnight.⁴

Community Engagement

- **Potential Best Practice:** Since the start of the pandemic, many libraries have been updating their websites and scaling up their social media presence to provide updated COVID-19 information, including local mitigation efforts, city services, public advisories, health directives and requests, tax and unemployment issues, and COVID-19 resources.⁴
- **Potential Best Practice:** Several public library branches in Toronto, Canada have partnered with local food banks to include free children’s books and flyers that highlight the libraries’ digital services in food hampers distributed to families.⁵
- **Potential Best Practice:** In Galveston County, Texas, a library has been collecting community stories related to the COVID-19 pandemic to permanently archive in a digital collection for future historians and residents. Communities stories include how small businesses have adjusted, how individuals have coped during the pandemic, and the experiences of medical professionals.⁶
- **Potential Best Practice:** In Denver, Colorado, librarians host virtual sessions that support a variety of groups, including small business owners, immigrant and asylee populations, and individuals searching for employment during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷
- **Potential Best Practice:** In Henrico County, Virginia, librarians have staffed an “isolation-specific” call outreach center to support senior citizens who may be experiencing the negative impacts of social isolation. Senior citizens can call with questions regarding resources, to set up times for wellness checks, or to simply talk. The center staff is available daily from 7AM-7PM as a resource during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸
- **Potential Best Practice:** The New York City School Library System has made available to the public a collection of free eBooks in multiple languages for children about COVID-19, social distancing, isolation, and empathy.⁹

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

⁶ 2020, Galveston County: The Daily News, Libraries capture local history of COVID-19 crisis, https://www.galvnews.com/news/free/article_4136dcdd-fc7a-5aff-9a85-7a73031b6fd8.html

⁷ 2020 National League of Cities, During COVID-19, Libraries Provide Critical Public Services, <https://citiesspeak.org/2020/05/01/during-covid-19-libraries-provide-critical-public-services/>

⁸ 2020 NBC 12, ‘It’s very comforting’: Henrico launches Senior Outreach Call Center during COVID-19 pandemic, <https://www.nbc12.com/2020/04/23/its-very-comforting-henrico-launches-senior-outreach-call-center-during-covid-pandemic/>

⁹ 2020 New York City School Library System, COVID-19 Free eBooks, <https://nycdoe.libguides.com/COVID-19ebooks/free?fbclid=IwAR1Tsw0Qt30ACAPTr9BLPC9Q-Z7QLgNVTBR-N-OVaDQngbD7R4wxhHgGgQ>