

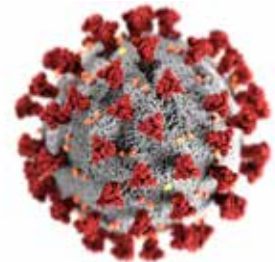
# LIBRARIES AND COVID-19

As information providers, community conveners, and partners in education, public health, crisis response, and community recovery efforts, public library staff knew they would be an important part of the response to COVID-19.

Libraries quickly shifted their service models. They expanded virtual services and online resources, made physical items available through curbside pick-up and home delivery, and adapted existing programs like Lunch at the Library to address food insecurity in the wake of school closures.

The majority of libraries report doing even more of what they already do well—building partnerships, providing family-friendly and widely accessible resources, and helping meet the demand for essentials like food, information, and technology.<sup>1</sup>

Innovative programs, policies, and partnerships that libraries put in place before and during the pandemic are helping them continue to deliver essential services. The virtual lights are on even when the front doors are closed.



## EXPANDING SERVICES

- Library websites already offered free, 24/7 access to many resources—from e-books to streaming video and recorded public events. By April 1, 2020, when 98 percent of libraries surveyed nationwide had closed their doors to the public, 74 percent had expanded their online check-out services, 61 percent had added online programming, and around 40 percent had added to their phone and online reference services.<sup>2</sup>
- In a nationwide survey, 81 percent of libraries responding said they left their public Wi-Fi network on for after-hours internet access before the pandemic; a further 12 percent added or expanded this service in response to the coronavirus closures. Forty-four percent of libraries also located access points to boost the Wi-Fi signal for easier connecting from parking lots and other nearby spaces. By April 2020, 23 percent of libraries were offering mobile hotspots for checkout.<sup>3</sup>
- Even small policy changes can have a big impact on library use and users. As branches began to close in 2020, libraries quickly extended loan periods on materials, increased renewal and item-checkout limits, canceled fines and fees, and made it easier to get a library card online to facilitate distance learning.<sup>4</sup>



- At a time when misinformation can be lethal, and many Americans doubt what they read online or in the news, the library's trustworthiness<sup>5</sup> is more important than ever. People expect libraries to provide accurate, carefully vetted and sourced information, especially in times of crisis.<sup>6</sup> By April 2020, 74 percent of surveyed libraries were using social media to share up-to-date COVID-19 information, and 62 percent were using it to promote participation in the United States Census.<sup>7</sup>

## REDIRECTING RESOURCES TOWARD SUSTAINED SUPPORT

- Many libraries repurposed equipment, supplies, and materials to help with COVID-19 relief, creating masks and shields for healthcare workers and fire departments. Library staff created *“lists and lists of resources for children’s activities; plans for improving adult job skills and dealing with job loss; hobby ideas; reading lists; ways to sleep better, meditate, and stay calm; ways to exercise; and ideas for virtual, social interaction.”*<sup>8</sup>



- Bookdrops in Oakland became collection bins for donated masks.<sup>9</sup> In San Francisco, the city’s public libraries were converted to childcare centers to assist healthcare workers in the early weeks of the statewide shelter-in-place orders.<sup>10</sup> Library workers helped staff food pantries, made grocery and meal deliveries to those in need, assisted with the city’s communication efforts, and served as contact tracers. Phone and chat reference expertise makes librarians excellent partners for the urgent information needs that arise in emergency service.<sup>11</sup>

- Hundreds of library staff members in the Los Angeles County library system have served as disaster service workers during the pandemic. While their colleagues continued delivering essential library services, these workers served as contact tracers, and worked with the Homeless Initiative and the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. As one library administrator states, *“We had a lot of people step up for these assignments that were not in their day-to-day job duties, but they did it and did well.”*<sup>12</sup>

- The Corona Public Library is reimagining its outdoor programs to keep kids learning, moving, and connecting with others during the pandemic. Library staff are presenting storytimes with whole-body movement and activities; they’ve created discovery boxes that encourage imagination and exploration; and they’re using hula hoops to support and maintain social distancing.<sup>13</sup>



**T**he El Dorado County Library immediately put its 3-D printers to work creating masks and face shields for healthcare workers. By early April 2020, they had formed a partnership with a local pharmaceutical startup to help produce and distribute thousands of face shields to local medical personnel and frontline workers.<sup>a</sup> By October, the library was also partnering with the El Dorado County Registrar of Voters to provide more face shields to poll workers, as well as hosting a voting center and drive-up ballot collection boxes at branches countywide.<sup>b</sup>

The library distributes free food, diapers, and other essentials in partnership with the Placer Food Bank, El Dorado Community Foundation, and First 5 El Dorado Commission.<sup>c</sup> Library staff also help community members register for vaccine appointments online. Many in the county do not have computers or access to the internet. The library received 200 calls and had dozens of people waiting at the library doors in the first three hours of offering this service.<sup>d</sup>

## NOTES

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