

Information Services



Section 1: Index of Key Considerations

Information Service includes reference and referral services, reader's advisory, technical help and instruction, work to reduce misinformation, and customer service.

1. During a pandemic and recovery from it, how can public libraries support the changing information needs of the community?
2. How can libraries provide meaningful customer support and technology assistance while maintaining physical distance?
 - a. consider safe and equitable access to both hardware and software
 - b. explore technical solutions to help maintain distance for all libraries including those with limited resources
3. How do libraries provide equitable access to information for those experiencing barriers to access?
 - a. technology access (devices, WiFi, know-how, etc.)
 - b. social isolation
 - c. language barriers (ESL/multilingual, literacy-levels, etc.)
 - d. accessibility barriers (digital and built environments)
4. How do libraries understand evolving community information needs and respond to them quickly?
 - a. needs that can be answered with technological solutions
 - b. needs that change as the stages of the pandemic change
5. How can public libraries support the health and safety of staff and customers while delivering information services?
 - a. so that staff feels safe/prepared enough to give the best possible customer service
 - b. with user centered service design including streamlined processes and clear communication

Section 2: Best & Leading Practices

Continue to support traditional library information services in a work-from-home environment that can be transitioned as needed in a phased re-opening of services. Use existing and new communication channels, technology, and service models to deliver information services to remote users and in-house users of libraries safely.

- Chat Bots / AI on websites (and on internal screens when libraries re-open)
- Continue to offer traditional virtual service (assistance by phone, email, chat, text)
- Screen sharing such as Apple share your screen, Anydesk, Zoho options for remote support
- Pre-recorded tutorials and webinars
- Email, chat, text, phone support using customer relationship management tools such as Freshdesk
- Bookable one-on-one sessions with an expert MS Bookings
- Offer information tutorial sessions via video conference/ virtual event software: Zoom, MS Teams, Webex, with consideration for those with barriers to visiting library or accessing online service

- Work with the ILS to create temporary fines and fees embargoes and extend due dates for materials until library buildings are re-opened to reduce customer concerns and inquiries about their account status
- Create documentation, tools, and/or leverage partnerships to assist customers filling out government forms

INFO NEEDS

- Implementing a robust marketing/communication plan is necessary to raise awareness of available services
- Triage community demands to focus first on the services most needed, with an awareness of those that are vulnerable
- Train staff before re-opening on how to deliver exceptional information services from behind a mask or face shield, behind a plexiglass screen, or from 2m away. Be aware of accessibility issues such as physical distancing and cloth masks impacting the ability for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing to hear and/or lip read
- Leverage social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), websites, webforms, blogs and other interfaces/software (ILS interface features, like BiblioCommons) to deliver reader's advisory through curated lists and individualized services

INFO REFERRAL

- Leverage partnerships with local and other organizations to
 - address social isolation, e.g. work with community partners to call people
 - offer information and referral services to other agencies
 - address information services gaps that other agencies don't cover
- Find a way to make relevant community resources easily findable for customers online via website, meeting accessibility standards via website (WCAG 2.0), and/or with self serve handouts
- Find ways to serve, as well as places to refer, customers experiencing accessibility issues
- Provide resource specific staff training to serve unique community needs

TECHNOLOGY

- Train staff well in new technologies to support them to provide best possible customer service
 - Online Card Registration
 - Remote printing service
- Prepare for the initial customers who will need access to technology
- Be flexible and responsive, leveraging partnerships with other organizations including vendors and their resources for technology. Explore various technologies to assist both remote users of library e-resources and in-house users of library computers/e-resources.
 - Look for opportunities to collaborate/partner with other organizations to augment existing technology solutions, e.g. share open source solutions
 - Provide virtual instructions for accessing e-resources or point to instructions created by the vendor
 - Partner with agencies or other libraries to use/create virtual assistance/tutorials on popular forms

- Provide public computer assistance to in-person customers while maintaining social distancing with tools such as [Anydesk](#), [Zoho](#) or use of a laser-pointer to show where to click on the screen
- Utilize computer labs to leverage projection screens for one-to-one appointments to support physical distancing between the customer and staff member
- Offer WiFi access outside of closed libraries while maintaining as much possible the safety of the public around library facilities (late hours, crowding, parking)
- Offer laptop, device, and data stick lending. Leverage partnerships to lend out technology to customers experiencing barriers and organizations that serve communities in need

STAFF & PUBLIC SAFETY

- Promote physical distancing and hand hygiene, reduce touchpoints and identify and communicate the process to sanitize touch points between customers
- At branches with security services, review expectations and integrate physical distancing education and reinforcement. Consider augmenting support recognizing limitations in capacity may cause customer conflict
- Create thorough cleaning and distancing protocols for public computer terminals and self-checkout machines; communicate those protocols widely with library employees and customers
- Set designated or assisted hours for vulnerable customers such as seniors or persons who are immunocompromised
- Use guidelines such as in the [Cushman and Wakefield](#) document to calculate how many people you can safely have in your spaces, including both public and employees, including study spaces and meeting rooms
- Consider maintaining information services work remotely as this could create more public space for other services including access to computers and study space
- Clearly communicate to your customers any new practices and policies that will affect service experience. Post these changes on your website, library entrances, and notify in email where possible. Consider creating videos for staff and customers of the new processes to increase comfort and understanding
- Post notices that customers who might be sick, have been exposed to someone sick, or have just returned to Canada should not enter the library
- Create a booking system for computer use at a predetermined time to assist in controlling the number of patrons in the building and minimizing conflict between patrons competing for technology
- Consider PPE in the form of masks, gloves, face shields and possibly gowns for employees assisting patrons with computers. If properly protected, employees can engage in closer contact with patrons
- Block access to areas of the library not open to the public
- With the guidance of the appropriate public health authority, decide how to handle masks – are customers expected to wear masks? If so, how do you handle patrons who don't have masks? Will customers who appear to be ill be asked to wear a mask? Will masks be available to customers who don't have them? Consider sanitization stations near desks and computers, if possible

Section 3: Stories from the Field

OFFERING TRADITIONAL LIBRARY SERVICES VIRTUALLY

- Aarhus Public Library partnered with organizations that are offering free or volunteer-based homework help
- Vaughan Public Library is doing creative readers' advisory through blog posts, i.e. book recommendations by zodiac sign
- Mississauga Library asks what people want to read and then posts suggestions the following day using Instagram Stories
- Calgary Public Library hosts live conversations with librarians and the social media specialist to answer real time questions from followers through Instagram Live
- The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County has created a phone hotline for job seekers and small business owners and online reader's advisory
- Burlington Public Library is collecting and organizing resources for kids and families to support interactive learning from home

DEVELOPING & LEVERAGING EXISTING TOOLS TO HELP CUSTOMERS NAVIGATE LIBRARY RESOURCES

- Westport Library in Connecticut has created LibGuides to assist patrons in navigating online resources
- University of Toronto – Mississauga has created resources based on frequently asked questions about basic information literacy, learning how to search the catalogue or databases, how to access ebooks, etc.
- Leveraging collaborations and vendor help. Use existing guides and share technology help documentation and tutorials for staff and public, e.g. Niche academy "Re-opening Lives collaboration." Toolshed, VPL to go ebooks and e-audio

WORK WITH LOCAL PARTNERS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY RESOURCES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE TO CUSTOMERS

- Oakville Public Library, Burlington Public Library, Milton Public Library and Halton Hills Public Library maintain the Halton Community Service Directory. COVID-19 specific topic lists have been created and organization listings are being updated regularly with service changes. HCSD information is being utilized by Halton municipalities to support pandemic planning efforts
- Hamilton Public Library Red Book staff have created topical lists that are available to the public and HPL frontline staff featuring resources about government financial support during COVID-19, resources for seniors, mental health supports, local COVID-19 assessment centres, food resources that are open for those experiencing food insecurity, and where free tax clinics are still being held in the area. Red Book staff are also continuing to provide up-to-date information to Ontario 211 about the Hamilton region
- These resources are customized, providing important information about local health and emergency services for persons experiencing vulnerabilities and who may be without digital access. New accessibility to the Toronto PL website, some new features include:
 - A new and improved Accessible Collections webpage

- Blog post on [Accessible Reading Options and Accessibility Tips](#)
- Surrey Libraries created a patron [searchable community resources sub-site](#) with COVID-19 specific resources

OFFERING ESL SERVICES & SERVICES IN OTHER LANGUAGES

- Hamilton Public Library continues to offer [newcomer services](#) through online ESL tutoring and has partnered with [McMaster students](#) to provide multilingual calls to socially isolated seniors
- Surrey Libraries uses its municipality's translation services available in more than 170 languages via phone, [language.com](#)
- Toronto Public Library's Library Settlement Partnership (LSP) has transitioned to remote. Settlement workers continue to provide services and support to newcomers by phone, email and web chat. For a more detailed description of how LSP is responding to COVID-19, see this recent [blog post](#)

CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS WHO MAY BE SOCIALLY ISOLATED

- Through the Friendly Calling Project, Hamilton Public Library staff call active library customers over the age of 75 to see how they are doing and if they would like regular callbacks. Staff listen to customer stories, provide information services and help with community referrals and online resources
- [Fort Worth Library](#) is calling all customers over the age of 65
- Toronto Public Library has printed resources highlighting essential services that have been posted at the entrances of 42 branch locations

DISTRIBUTING TECHNOLOGY

- Calgary Public Library distributed over 300 Chromebooks and another 100 are staged and awaiting distribution through a City of Calgary contact (who deploys them to various social agencies). 50 of that next 100 are designated for distribution to Indigenous users
- Saskatoon Public Library has loaned Chromebooks, WiFi hotspot, laptops to volunteers working with people who need assistance to apply for government support programs

PROVIDING WAYS FOR CUSTOMERS TO GET A LIBRARY CARD

- [Burlington Public Library](#) and [Hamilton Public Library](#) are using Quipu to verify address information through online card registration. [Surrey Libraries](#) have created an in-house model to create cards manually

OFFERING REMOTE PRINTING SOLUTIONS

- Calgary Public Library has developed [Everyone Print](#) allowing customers to send a print job from home and have staff print it by entering the library barcode
- Coquitlam Public Library offers [print services via email](#)

Section 4: Resources

- ALA Recommends WiFi open during closure <http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2020/03/american-library-association-recommends-libraries-leave-wifi-open-during>

- CCOHS – Tips for Retail:
<https://www.ccohs.ca/images/products/pandemiccovid19/pdf/retail.pdf>
- Cushman Wakefield: Recovery Readiness: A How-to Guide for Re-opening your Workplace <https://www.cushmanwakefield.com/en/insights/covid-19/recovery-readiness-a-how-to-guide-for-reopening-your-workplace>
- Forbes article. Customer Experience Mindset Post-COVID
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2020/04/27/customer-experience-mindset-in-a-post-covid-19-world-an-infograph/#259370a53d0e>
- KPMG Customer First Approach During Unprecedented Times
<https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2020/04/a-customer-first-approach-during-unprecedented-times.pdf>
- HBR: Supporting Customer Service Through the Coronavirus Crisis
<https://hbr.org/2020/04/supporting-customer-service-through-the-coronavirus-crisis>

FRENCH RESOURCES

- Heureduconte.ca, « un inventaire des heures du conte disponibles pour écoute en différé, un calendrier d'heures du conte en direct ainsi que des balados et livres audio pour enfants » / brings together virtual and audio storytelling hours on a single platform – Association des bibliothèques publiques du Québec (ABPQ)
- QuoiLire.ca, « un service de suggestions de lecture numérique personnalisée par le biais d'un formulaire en ligne » / Personalized literary suggestions from an expert from Quebec public libraries – Association des bibliothèques publiques du Québec (ABPQ)
- Infobiblio.ca, « aide pour utiliser la plateforme de prêt de livres numériques [Pretnumerique.ca](https://pretnumerique.ca) ainsi que du soutien pour accéder à l'offre de ressources à distance » / help to use the digital book lending platform [Pretnumerique.ca](https://pretnumerique.ca) as well as support to access the offer of resources remotely – Bibliopresto
- Bibliothèques et archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) – blogs / makers activities
- Bibliothèque de Frontenac (Bibliothèques de Montréal) is doing readers' advisory, crafts and games recommendations, boardgames and puzzles to print, resources for students through Instagram posts
- Bibliothèque Robert-Bourassa id.
- Bibliothèques du Plateau
- Bibliothèque Le Prévost
- Bibliothèques scolaires CSDM (Commission scolaire de Montréal). [Liste de lecture pour survivre à la COVID-19](#)
- Bibliothèque de Terrebonne. [Nouvelles ressources numériques](#)
- La Voix de l'Est. [À un clic de 1300 cours en ligne](#)
- Bibliothèques de UdeM – laptop loan

Section 5: Authors & Acknowledgements

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