Frequently asked questions: Resource sharing practice in the time of COVID-19

Phase I: Highlights from OCLC SHARES Town Halls 1 – 25

26 March – 18 June 2020

Note: This material captures developments during the first three months of the pandemic crisis and in some instances may not reflect current conditions.

Starting in March 2020, when COVID-19 forced most libraries to shut down, send staff home to work remotely, and focus on providing collections and services digitally, the SHARES resource sharing consortium began coming together virtually twice a week to exchange information, ask questions, and work together to figure out how to continue offering interlibrary loan and other resource sharing services amidst the unprecedented challenges and disruptions brought on by the pandemic.

In May 2020, volunteers from the SHARES Best Practices Working Group began synthesizing the highlights of the town halls and expressing them as FAQs on high-interest, resource-sharing-in-the-time-of-COVID topics. The FAQs in this document present highlights from roughly the first 90 days of the pandemic crisis, covering SHARES Town Halls 1 through 25. They are intended to serve as a source of useful operational information and to capture how resource sharing professionals banded together to respond to the challenges imposed by the first phase of a global pandemic.

SHARES, the resource sharing consortium for members of the OCLC Research Library Partnership, is a unique collaborative venture among large and medium-sized academic libraries, art and law libraries, and one major public library, spread across five countries.

Main areas of focus for SHARES libraries during Phase I of the pandemic crisis included:

- Creating new ways to track things that our current interlibrary loan technical infrastructure isn't able to track, such as which lenders are able to scan from print materials as opposed to just supplying from e-resources
- Navigating the copyright implications of resource sharing during a pandemic when most physical libraries are closed
- Strategizing about utilizing usage data for material temporarily brought out from behind paywalls by publishers and content providers in negotiating for expanded access after the pandemic
- Pondering what the long-term effects of the pandemic will be on libraries, resource sharing, and the way research is conducted
- Coping with working from home and providing services remotely for the first time
- Addressing health and safety concerns related to the pandemic
- Finding creative ways to manage staff working remotely and keep everyone engaged in useful tasks

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Borrowing

How can I determine if a library is able to supply scans from its print holdings?

Many lending libraries are using a **16-day LOAN "Days to Respond"** setting in the OCLC Policies Directory to indicate their ability to supply articles or book chapters from their print holdings. This information is seen when viewing OCLC holdings while placing a request.

This utilization of the "days to respond" setting arose organically within the library community, being suggested at an OCLC ILL webinar at the beginning of the pandemic crisis. The logic was that almost no libraries were loaning physical materials, so this was a field which could be used seamlessly in order to convey crucial information, namely whether a library could supply scans from e-resources only (20 days) or print and e-resources (16 days).

The idea found swift support and was subsequently publicized on various ILL listservs, with the result being that many libraries worldwide had updated their "days to respond" settings by the end of March. Concern remained that the uptake of this policy was far from universal, so that it was still not possible for borrowing libraries to immediately ascertain the current scanning policies of libraries that maintained loan "days to respond" settings outside 16 or 20. There was also a degree of apprehension that the relatively small number of "16 day" libraries might be overwhelmed with requests.

References:

Town Hall 14: 12 May 2020

Updated: 8 June 2020

How can I determine if a library is able to supply scans from its e-resource holdings?

A new OCLC profile group (**ACOV**) was created for libraries able to supply articles or book chapters from their e-resources. Borrowing libraries can create a new Custom Holdings Group with the ACOV libraries and then create a new ACOV Custom Holdings Path to facilitate placing requests. Additionally, many lending libraries are using a **20-day LOAN "Days to Respond"** setting in the OCLC Policies Directory to indicate their ability to supply articles or book chapters from their e-resources. This "days to respond" information is seen when viewing OCLC holdings while placing a request.

References:

Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020
Town Hall 4: 7 April 2020
Town Hall 3: 2 April 2020
Town Hall 2: 31 March 2020

Updated: 27 May 2020

How can I determine if a library is able to supply a whole e-book?

A new OCLC profile group (**BCOV**) was created for libraries able to supply entire e-books. Borrowing libraries can create a new Custom Holdings Group with the BCOV libraries and then create a new BCOV Custom Holdings Path to place requests. A previously existing e-book group (**EBOK**) represents additional libraries willing to supply e-books from specific publishers.

Concern has been expressed that it is sometimes difficult to verify from which publishers individual libraries can supply e-books, as this tends to be specific to each library and their licensing agreements.

VIVA e-book lending recommendations: https://vivalib.org/c.php?g=836990&p=6096678

References:

Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020
Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020
Town Hall 4: 7 April 2020

Town Hall 2: 31 March 2020

Updated: 27 May 2020

What are other borrowing request options for those institutions that are not members of OCLC, Rapid, or DOCLINE?

Two such options are Resource Sharing During COVID-19 (RSCVD) and the Rapid COVID-19 Initiative. Both are free to borrowers and involve ILL lenders volunteering to fill requests for those who use the services.

The IFLA Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Section Standing Committee initiated **Resource Sharing during COVID-19 (RSCVD)** to provide another means of requesting articles and book chapters from other institutions worldwide. An online request form was created by the IFLA Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Section Standing Committee, with the help of InstantILL. The initial search box checks for immediate availability via the Open Access Button and, if not available from open-access sources, the citation can be submitted via the request form. Volunteer libraries around the world work on the requests to fill what they can from the collections that are currently available to them (as of the middle of June, this is still predominantly from their e-resources).

The Rapid COVID-19 Initiative is a new COVID-19 pod created to facilitate the requesting of articles and book chapters by a limited number of non-Rapid participant libraries. Borrowing libraries are provided with instructions and guidance on how to place requests in Rapid. Requests are then filled by Rapid member libraries that have volunteered to participate in this special COVID-19 pod. As of the end of May, almost 250 non-Rapid libraries have registered and are set up to borrow. Over 180 Rapid members are currently participating as lenders in the COVID-19 pod. The COVID-19 pod initiative will officially end 1 September.

References:

Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020
Town Hall 11: 30 April 2020
Town Hall 9: 23 April 2020
Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020

Updated: 16 June 2020

How can I request that GEBAY (and other German and Swiss libraries) supply articles electronically, rather than by airmail?

Enter **MyBib eL** in the **Ship via** field of the OCLC request form to indicate that you would like electronic delivery, rather than via airmail. You will need the MyBib eL Viewer in order to open the article (beginning with Viewer 3.0, Java Webstart is no longer needed).

MyBib eL Viewer installation and configuration information:
https://manuals.imageware.de/en/mybib/mybib-el/handbuecher/mybib-el-viewer/mybib-el-viewer-installation/

References:

Town Hall 11: 30 April 2020
Town Hall 10: 28 April 2020

Updated: 8 June 2020

What is happening with borrowing requests that cannot be filled by traditional ILL sources due to library closures?

In cases where borrowing requests were not able to be filled because all potential lenders, greatly reduced in number at this time, had been exhausted, libraries were following a variety of strategies.

- Some cancelled the request but advised the patron that they could re-request once things got back to normal and more potential suppliers were available. Some libraries noted that they tried to avoid the word "cancel" and notified their patrons that the request had been "closed" but could be "reopened" once the library situation had returned to a more normal footing.
- Alternatively, some libraries were routing such requests to a holding queue and informing patrons that the request would be reactivated when potential suppliers were once again available. Some of these libraries noted that they might re-evaluate this policy if the closures became long term.
- Libraries were making use of some of the extended online resources that had recently become available to supply patrons with requested items.
- In cases where e-books with an institutional license were available, these were sometimes purchased for the library's collection, or the patron was advised to request a purchase from the subject bibliographer (depending on the purchase policy and workflow at individual institutions).

References:

Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020

Updated: 8 June 2020

Copyright

Is copyright relaxed during the pandemic crisis?

No, copyright law is still in force during the pandemic crisis.

References:

Town Hall 24: 16 June 2020
Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020

Updated: 16 June 2020

Are there authoritative resources that provide guidance on copyright compliance during the pandemic crisis?

Yes. The document [Public Statement of Library Copyright Specialists: Fair Use & Emergency Remote Teaching & Research](#) was written by copyright specialists at colleges, universities, and other organizations supporting higher education in the US and Canada and was released on 13 March 2020.

References:

Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020

Updated: 16 June 2020

Is Controlled Digital Lending (CDL) allowed under current copyright law?

The concept of Controlled Digital Lending–circulating a digital copy of an in-copyright print work to one user at a time while sequestering your physical print copy–has not been tested in court.

A document entitled [Position Statement on Controlled Digital Lending](#) was published in 2018 by several copyright attorneys and law school affiliates (a dean, a professor, and a fellow), laying out "a good faith interpretation of US copyright law for American libraries considering how to perform traditional lending functions using digital technology while preserving an appropriate balance between the public benefit of such lending and the protected interests of private rights holders." This is supported by a subsequent [White Paper on the Controlled Digital Lending of Library Books](#), published by two co-authors of the position statement, and a [Controlled Digital Lending Fact Sheet,](#) or FAQ.

At least one SHARES law library has reported that their legal counsel does not believe Controlled Digital Lending to be allowable under fair use and finds nothing in Section 108 to convince them that CDL is allowable under current copyright law.

Other SHARES libraries have embraced Controlled Digital Lending and participate in the Internet Archive's [Open Library](#).

References:

Town Hall 20: 2 June 2020
Town Hall 15: 14 May 2020
Town Hall 6: 14 April 2020
Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020

Updated: 16 June 2020

What was the National Emergency Library?

The National Emergency Library was started by the Internet Archive in mid-March 2020 in response to libraries closing temporarily worldwide due to the pandemic crisis. Basically, the National Emergency Library was identical to the Internet Archive's regular program of lending digital copies of books of which it owns a physical copy, but with waiting lists suspended through 30 June 2020. Normally, the number of digitals copies available for borrowing from the Internet Archive is equal to the number of physical copies owned by the Archive, with users signing up for waiting lists when all available copies are in use. Under the National Emergency Library, an unlimited number of digital books were made available to any user who wanted to borrow them.

The Internet Archive closed the National Emergency Library on 16 June 2020, two weeks earlier than planned, after four commercial publishers filed a lawsuit against the Internet Archive for copyright infringement. It is still possible to borrow digital books from the Internet Archive's collection, but waiting lists have been reinstituted when all available copies of a title are in use.

References:

Town Hall 23: 11 June 2020

Updated: 16 June 2020

Lending

How can I indicate that my library is able to supply scans from our print holdings?

Edit your LOAN "Days to Respond" setting to **16 days** in the OCLC Policies Directory. Libraries using this setting typically are able to fill article and book chapter requests from both their print and e-resource holdings.

This utilization of the "days to respond" setting arose organically within the library community, being suggested at an OCLC ILL webinar at the beginning of the pandemic crisis. The logic was that almost no libraries were loaning physical materials, so this was a field which could be used seamlessly in order to convey crucial information, namely whether a library could supply scans from e-resources only (20 days) or print and e-resources (16 days).

The idea found swift support and was subsequently publicized on various ILL listservs, with the result being that many libraries worldwide had updated their "days to respond" settings by the end of March. Concern remained that the uptake of this policy was far from universal, so that it was still not possible for borrowing libraries to immediately ascertain the current scanning policies of libraries that maintained loan "days to respond" settings outside 16 or 20. There was also a degree of apprehension that the relatively small number of "16 day" libraries might be overwhelmed with requests.

References:

Town Hall 14: 12 May 2020

How can I indicate that my library is able to supply article and book chapter scans from our e-resource holdings?

Edit your LOAN "Days to Respond" setting to **20 days** in the OCLC Policies Directory.

Join the **ACOV** (lenders who can supply article requests electronically during COVID-19) profile group in OCLC by emailing orders@oclc.org and including the full name and acronym of the group in the email.

References:

Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020
Town Hall 4: 7 April 2020
Town Hall 3: 2 April 2020
Town Hall 2: 31 March 2020

How can I indicate that my library is able to supply a whole e-book?

Join the **BCOV** (lenders who can supply e-books during COVID-19) and/or **EBOK** (libraries supplying full e-books) profile group(s) in OCLC by emailing orders@oclc.org and including the full name and acronym of the group in the email.

Concern has been expressed that it is sometimes difficult to verify from which publishers individual libraries can supply e-books, as this tends to be specific to each library and their licensing agreements.

References:

Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020
Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020
Town Hall 4: 7 April 2020
Town Hall 2: 31 March 2020

How can I volunteer to help supply resources to libraries that aren't members of OCLC, Rapid, and DOCLINE?

Two volunteer opportunities for those who wish to help supply resources to such libraries are Resource Sharing During COVID-19 (RSCVD) and the Rapid COVID-19 Initiative. Both options are free to borrowers.

The IFLA Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Section Standing Committee initiated Resource Sharing during COVID-19 (RSCVD) to provide another means of requesting scans, especially by libraries who do not use OCLC, Rapid, or DOCLINE.

Incoming requests are entered on a shared spreadsheet, where requestors are verified as being affiliated with academic, public, school, or special libraries at not-for-profit institutions. Volunteers at institutions around the world then search through the incoming requests for citations they can supply from the holdings that are currently accessible to them. As of this writing, in the middle of June, most requests were being filled from e-resources.

Articles and book chapters are supplied as PDFs, which are securely transmitted to the requester via OCLC Article Exchange. Volunteers helping with the fulfillment of requests indicate that the workload is manageable, since they work on the requests as much, or as little, as their other work and life responsibilities allow. IFLA sees this project continuing, in one form or another, after the current COVID-19 crisis.

To volunteer, email ifladdrs@gmail.com.

Rapid has initiated a new COVID-19 pod in order to facilitate the requesting of articles and book chapters by a limited number of non-RAPID participant libraries. Borrowing libraries are provided with instructions and guidance on how to place requests in Rapid. Requests are then filled by Rapid member libraries that have volunteered to participate in this special COVID-19 pod. As of the end of May, almost 250 non-Rapid libraries have registered and are set up to borrow. Over 180 Rapid members are currently participating as lenders in the COVID-19 pod. The COVID-19 pod initiative will officially end 1 September.

References:

Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020
Town Hall 11: 30 April 2020
Town Hall 9: 23 April 2020
Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020

Updated: 16 June 2020

What is happening with books that were updated to Shipped in OCLC but that were not able to actually be mailed out?

Since many libraries had little advance notice of closure, there were cases in which a library had updated a loan to Shipped but was not able to actually mail the item out. The question arose as to whether lenders should proactively contact the borrowing libraries to notify them that the books were not mailed out. Opinions differed on the best course of action, with some indicating that given the small number of requests (typically no more than one day's worth of loans), it would be a courtesy to notify borrowers. On the other hand, it was noted that as this was a global pandemic and library closures were the norm, library staff should be aware of the potential for loans caught in this sort of limbo and advised that borrowing libraries could send individual queries to lenders, as needed.

References:

Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020

Updated: 8 June 2020

Licensing

How might the pandemic crisis present an opportunity for re-engaging with publishers and content providers about licensing?

Many publishers and content providers have temporarily brought things out from behind paywalls during the pandemic crisis. Libraries will have detailed use data for these resources during the crisis and can use such analytics to inform their conversations with publishers and content providers during licensing negotiations. It will no longer be a mystery about what would happen if content is brought out from behind paywalls.

References:

Town Hall 11: 30 April 2020

Updated: 17 June 2020

What implications does The Ohio State University's recent Read and Publish agreement with Taylor & Francis have for resource sharing?

The agreement, the first of its kind made by Taylor & Francis in North America, gives OSU patrons access to 2,300+ Taylor & Francis's electronic journals (all years, all volumes, including latest articles and e-pubs). **OSU also has ILL rights for lending in their license, including internationally, and staff are working to place their symbol on records in WorldCat and on the collections in OCLC's WorldCat knowledge base .**

The signed agreement also covers all open-access publishing costs for OSU authors who want to publish in Taylor & Francis titles. So all articles by OSU authors can be made openly available at the time of publication if the authors wish it, at no cost to the author. An open-access publishing agreement will be used for authors to retain rights and publish with a Creative Commons license.

References:

Town Hall 23: 11 June 2020

Updated: 17 June 2020

Most efforts to arrange for the interlibrary lending of e-books have focused on getting publishers to put language into their licenses allowing ILL. Is there another viable approach?

SHARES members who attended a 2 June webinar on reserves and controlled digital lending, put on by the South Carolina Library Association, reported that Harvard University copyright advisor Kyle K. Courtney takes the position that "the best way forward for libraries will be to insist on a buy-not-rent model for acquiring e-books from publishers."

References:

Town Hall 20: 2 June 2020

Updated: 16 June 2020

Long-term effects

What might the long-term effects of the current pandemic be for the future of library resource sharing?

In considering the potential big picture/future effects of the current pandemic, the role of library resource sharing specialists remains, as always, to serve library users, to advocate for what we do with local administrators, to preserve what is working well, and to incorporate innovative policies, procedures, workflows, and services that enable us to adapt to ever-evolving conditions. From the effects of sharing library resources in a pandemic to the overwhelming strength of calls for social justice and **anti-racism** that have been seen during this time, lasting changes are likely, and hopefully positive effects will be realized.

Working remotely, away from most of our print collections, has temporarily limited what we can share. But library resource sharing specialists always find ways to share what we can. The data we now have about unfilled ILL requests clearly shows that needed information cannot be filled from digital resources alone. This means that we need to continue to preserve and share print, whether in libraries or shared repositories or remote storage. Additionally, for library workers who are on site in libraries or shared print repositories, we need to make sure they are able to safely scan from print and mail physical items. In the future, more libraries may mail physical materials directly to library users, to be returned with prepaid mailers or to local libraries for remote pickup, as more people become distant education students. If items cannot be borrowed, then libraries may purchase them (**patron-driven acquisition**) and send material directly to students until they are done with them. **Students and information seekers** may change behaviors as faculty reconsider assignments, and they may rely on reserves or open educational resources more. **International** information needs must also be addressed, as well as local needs for international information, as we seek to combat issues such as global pandemics with global solutions. So, no matter what, research remains essential and researchers and students still need print and still need interlibrary loan and document delivery and all the other services that library resource sharing specialists provide.

References:

Town Hall 23: 11 June 2020 *Anti-racism resources*
Town Hall 16: 19 May 2020 *Patron-driven acquisition*
Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020 *International ILL*

Town Hall 9: 23 April 2020 *Purchasing materials on demand and delivering them straight to users*
Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020 *International ILL*
Town Hall 7: 16 April 2020 *Info seeker behavior*
Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020 *Purchase on demand*

The experience of remote work and digital-only (or mostly) access to information also highlights the need for **open-access information and open educational resources** as well as more sharing of **digital licensed resources.** Licensed big deals are already being questioned, and embargos and license terms that limit sharing must also be reviewed. We must advocate and negotiate for more rights to share information through a wide variety of methods so that librarians can continue to share needed information in the digital environment. **E-books** are increasingly being requested through ILL. We also need the right to share what we pay for, a clear way to know what we are licensed to share, and a way to share with Controlled Digital Lending. More digitization projects would also enable more access to information. Copyright guidelines need review so that they promote the progress of science and the useful arts rather than limit information sharing.

References:

Town Hall 16: 19 May 2020 Controlled Digital Lending
Town Hall 15: 14 May 2020
Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020 RLUK manifesto/May 18 Webinar on "the digital shift in libraries"
Town Hall 7: 16 April 2020
Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020
Town Hall 3: 2 April 2020

Any changes in library resource sharing, whether in meta policies or services or specific workflows, will affect **staffing** needs. Working remotely has proven to be possible for many library resource sharing specialists. We can access our systems and share digital information (within the limits of current license terms and copyright guidelines for emergencies.) And, we can meet remotely and work together remotely, contributing to the shared work of the consortial partners that we rely on. If we do find that more people work from home in the future, there will be a need for home offices to be more ergonomic (with dual monitors, external keyboards, office chairs, etc.) Library staff can process electronic lending and make borrowing requests remotely with the proper equipment, training, etc. And, we will also still need library workers who can scan from print onsite or from shared print/remote storage facilities, and who can do so **safely**, with necessary PPE and protocols.

References:

Town Hall 14: 12 May 2020 *Work and health, furloughs*
Town Hall 5: 9 April 2020 *Work and health*
Town Hall 4: 7 April 2020 *Work and health*

And, of course, in the future, we will depend on adequate **budgets** for collections and technology and for staff. An economic downturn and threats to higher education mean that what we need to do our work and serve our library users is being threatened. So, again, it is essential that we demonstrate the value of what we do as well as the value of consortial memberships for meeting information needs by

sharing library resources. We also need to examine our tools and our memberships, supporting those that make our work possible in the most cost-effective ways, now as always.

References:

Town Hall 25: 18 June 2020 *SHARES value*
Town Hall 17: 21 May 2020 *SHARES value*
Town Hall 3: 2 April 2020 *ILL value*

Updated 25 June 2020

Return to the library

How are libraries planning for the return to work?

In early conversations about the return to work, there were many unknowns. Members were unsure of how their states would handle the return to the workplace, and many had not received information about plans for summer and fall courses. Many were concerned for the safety of staff as they planned for the return to the workplace; this seemed to be the primary concern for most. In more recent town halls, members shared tales from their return to the library as plans continue to be developed, including discussions of the "in between" time, when the library is open to staff but not yet open to patrons, and the services that they plan to offer in this period.

Members who have returned to onsite work discussed the difference between abstract plans and the reality of being onsite during Town Hall 26. Many plans that have been made have been revised once work has commenced in the library. This included discussion about removing furniture to allow for social distancing, putting tape on the floor in public service areas, and adding one-way arrows on the floors in the stacks.

During Town Hall 23, members who have access to the HathiTrust Emergency Technical Access Service (ETAS) also discussed how they are managing retaining access to those materials while also ensuring that the physical items aren't circulating, [per the agreement with HathiTrust](). Some members reported manually checking requests from patrons against HathiTrust before fulfilling them from their own collections. Others are investigating automation of this process, looking at how their ILS could display only HathiTrust holdings for materials available in ETAS.

Members who had returned to their libraries discussed the physically tiring and dusty work of unpacking, sorting, and processing returned items during Town Hall 22. Members also discussed how the need for social distancing requires a limited number of staff onsite at any given time. Many find themselves without student workers, and that may continue into the fall. Members noted that it may be difficult to continue providing the same level of service without these vital positions, and they may need to prioritize their local patrons over resource sharing services. Members discussed curbside pickup services, including the challenges and logistics, during Town Hall 20.

In earlier conversations (such as Town Hall 19), members shared specific return-to-work plans that had been developed at their institutions, while others noted that they were still developing local plans. Some

reported that they had not received much communication from their institutions about returning to onsite work. At the time, many pointed to fall semester as a huge unknown, since many institutions did not know if students would be returning to campus for the fall 2020 semester. This was perhaps contributing to the lack of communication regarding return to onsite work.

Discussion about reopening the library to staff came up during Town Halls 13 and 14, where people shared more details about their planning processes. During Town Hall 15, we heard stories from members as they returned to their libraries, some for the first time in many weeks. They described many of their new processes, including curbside pickup, mailing items to patrons, and safety procedures.

In early SHARES town hall discussions, libraries were in the early planning stages for safe return to work, and there were still many unknowns. Libraries were waiting for decisions from lawmakers in their respective regions as well as decisions from their own institutional leadership. Members talked about decisions being made for classes to remain online during the summer 2020. Conversations also pointed to what could happen for the fall semester, which pushed out timelines for return to work and getting back to "business as usual." In Town Hall 8, members talked about the many practical and ethical questions that our institutions have to consider when it comes to returning to campus. Many members talked about what libraries need to do to provide safe environments for their employees.

See the **Safety and compliance** section for more details about measures that libraries are taking to return to work safely.

References:

Town Hall 26: 25 June 2020
Town Hall 23: 11 June 2020
Town Hall 22: 9 June 2020
Town Hall 20: 2 June 2020
Town Hall 19: 28 May 2020
Town Hall 15: 14 May 2020
Town Hall 14: 12 May 2020
Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020
Town Hall 8: 21 April 2020

Updated 25 June 2020

What can ILL staff expect during their first day or week back in the library building after a COVID-19 closure?

Many ILL staff members report similar experiences upon returning to work in their libraries after several weeks of working from home.

- The place is usually quite dusty.
- There are piles of packages waiting and bins full of returned books.
- For the first few days, the work is quite physical and physically tiring.

- It feels "weirdly normal" to be back in the building—weird because there are so few people around, and normal because there are so many routine tasks to do, mixed in with all the strangeness.
- Being in the physical space again brings to mind many issues, challenges, and fine details about preparing the library for reopening that may not have been touched upon in the official planning, such as what to do about:
  - Restrooms
  - Drinking fountains
  - Stairwells
  - Elevators
  - Narrow aisles in the stacks
  - Self-serve hold shelves
  - Monitoring multiple entrances and exits to the library
  - Spaces envisioned as temporary offices that offer no internet access
  - Not having enough book trucks
  - Not having enough packing material
  - Not having enough PPE

Being newly back in the building during the pandemic crisis brings with it other challenges besides just dust and piles of books and packages to be processed. Two sets of challenges that staff newly returning to their buildings must cope with revolve around staffing levels and safety issues.

- Staffing levels
  - Social distancing requires fewer staff in the building at the same time.
  - Many academic libraries find themselves without their student workers, which may continue into the fall.
  - Some plan to cross-train other workers who would otherwise be furloughed, such as lunchroom staff, to do library tasks.
  - It will be challenging to provide services with what are basically skeleton crews.
  - It will also be challenging to prioritize which services get resources first; some will focus on getting their own resources to their own patrons, with ILL as both a lender and borrower being a priority that comes to the top later.
- Safety issues within the building
  - Some express concern about HVAC and air circulation in general, especially in buildings without windows that open.
  - Some places are requiring masks at all times and supplying PPE.
  - Some are putting tape on the floor in offices and throughout the library.
  - A few are considering putting up plexiglass.
  - Some express fear of being exposed at work and bringing the virus home to those living with them.
  - Some are anxious about having to use public transit in order to get to work.

References:

Town Hall 25: 18 June 2020
Town Hall 22: 9 June 2020
Town Hall 15: 14 May 2020

Updated 24 June 2020

How will library staff know when we can return materials to other libraries?

Early on, it became clear that library staff would need a way to track when libraries began reopening so that materials could be returned. During Town Hall 10, members brainstormed several ideas. Peter Collins, OCLC's Director of Resource Sharing, said he would discuss the creation of a public spreadsheet with his team. During Town Hall 13, members were provided with an update about that form. Libraries can enter their information/status at oc.lc/mailform and view the status of other libraries at oc.lc/mailstatus.

In Town Hall 17, Peter Collins and Cathy King of OCLC asked for feedback about OCLC's new mapping tool, created from the mail form spreadsheet. On 28 May, OCLC shared the new mapping tool with the community. The map can be found at https://libraries.oclc.org/.

In Town Hall 21, we heard a report from a medium-sized academic library in the western United States where staff have been back in the building for several weeks. Much time was being spent sorting bins full of books and sending ILL returns back to other libraries. OCLC's "Mail Room Open" form, spreadsheet, and map have proven to be very helpful.

References:

Town Hall 21: **4 June 2020**
Town Hall 17: 21 May 2020
Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020
Town Hall 10: 28 April 2020

Updated 23 June 2020

How are libraries planning to open their libraries to the public? What measures will they take to protect patrons?

Most discussions that occurred in early Town Halls regarding opening the library focused on how members were planning to get staff back in their buildings safely. Later conversations began to focus on what services would look like as libraries began to reopen to the public.

During Town Hall 26, members discussed concerns about welcoming patrons back to their respective library buildings. Would all students return? Will spikes in coronavirus cases cause shutdowns after libraries reopen, and what happens in that event? Many also wondered if masks would be required, and if so, how those measures would be enforced. Many noted that their plans include the requirement of masks, but don't include steps or support for enforcement.

Members talked about serving distance learners in Town Hall 25. Some libraries have dropped the distance requirement for mailing materials to patrons and have begun to ship materials to users. Members are concerned not only with returning to library buildings but also with traveling to buildings. Public transportation has been mentioned, which will affect patrons as well. Reciprocal onsite access was also discussed, as members anticipated that patrons may remain off campus and demand for reciprocal onsite access may pick up. However, nobody plans at this point to allow visitors into the library when they reopen for the foreseeable future.

Members also talked about curbside pickup. Some are planning to use bags to deliver materials to patrons in their vehicles. Others are considering variations to direct patron contact, such as putting crates containing library materials outside but where they are protected from the elements, such as on the loading dock or in a lobby. There was also a discussion about waterproof lockers and whether that might be a possibility for patron pickup. Members were not aware of any waterproof locker options.

During Town Hall 24, members focused on how to handle physical reserves and how to handle providing those materials to patrons. Some members discussed the possibility of using UV lamps, though every page would need to be exposed to UV light.

Town Hall 22 saw a continuation of earlier conversations about the return to campus. While much of the conversation related to staff return to work, some pieces of information related to providing eventual service to patrons. Members discussed staffing limitations, particularly as they find themselves without student workers. While the impacts of that may not be felt as much during the summertime, many fear that they will not have students workers in the fall. This could significantly impact libraries' ability to provide the same level of services that they have in the past. Staff are planning for around 30% occupancy when patrons return to the library, and many are just beginning to think about the logistics of how to enforce/manage that capacity. Some are considering limited hours, services by appointment only, or closed stacks. Managing patron expectations will be key to the library's success.

In Town Hall 20, some members noted that they expected to welcome their own patrons back to the library in the summer or fall but didn't foresee allowing visitors in until the fall or spring. Members shared their concerns about returning to their workspaces while questions remain about safety protocols during Town Hall 21. Others expressed concerns about having to rely on public transportation to return to the workplace, which will also affect patrons as they travel to campus. Members began to share their university or library plans for returning to campus.

References:

Town Hall 26: 25 June 2020
Town Hall 25: 18 June 2020
Town Hall 24: 16 June 2020
Town Hall 22: 9 June 2020
Town Hall 21: **4 June 2020**
Town Hall 20: 2 June 2020

Updated 25 June 2020

Safety and compliance

What best practices are libraries following to safely reopen?

Reopening guidelines may vary from state to state; check local and state government resources for up-to-date guidelines for your area. If you are curious about how to safely handle materials, a summary of the REALM project (which is studying how long the virus survives on a variety of surfaces) can be found in the next question.

Beyond what is recommended/required at your state or university level, discussions in several SHARES Town Halls brought up the following suggestions for safe reopening of spaces.

- Shifted staff schedules (including continued telework part-time) and "skeleton crews" to properly social distance
- Required use of PPE equipment by all onsite workers (including contracted staff, like a cleaning company, that aren't necessarily employed by the library)
- Investigation of your library's HVAC system and air circulation in general, especially in buildings without windows that open
- Closed stacks model and expanded paging to limit user movement in building (if you allow patrons back in)
- Curbside pickup and/or home delivery if possible
- Use of study rooms and other user spaces as private offices for those who don't have them
- Guidelines to limit the number of users in restrooms, elevators, and other spaces, and a plan to enforce these guidelines
- Self-checkout apps; some libraries are already using or are considering using the MeeScan app so users can do self-checkout without standing in the self-checkout line

In Town Hall 19, there was a discussion of having to handle pressure from library and/or university administration to provide services in a way or at a volume/speed that will compromise safety precautions. While no one currently is experiencing this, several people anticipated having to navigate and/or push back on decisions or policies that are not compatible with providing services in a socially distant way.

References:

Town Hall 19: 28 May 2020
Town Hall 15: 14 May 2020
Town Hall 14: 12 May 2020
Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020

Updated: 8 June 2020

How long does COVID-19 live on surfaces, especially books?

On 22 June 2020, the REALM project released the results of its first round of testing, which indicated that **"the SARS-CoV-2 virus was not detectable on the materials after three days of quarantine."** Further details of the test results can be found on the [REALM website](#).

While many institutions were formulating ideas to mitigate the transmission of the virus on their materials, there has been no conclusive evidence of how long the virus will live on library materials. The conclusions of scientific studies done to date differ, and they were based on similar viruses, but not COVID-19.

On 22 April 2020, IMLS announced a research project to investigate this. Partnering with Battelle, a scientific research lab with headquarters in Columbus, Ohio, and OCLC, a long list of library and museum material types will be tested to see how long this new coronavirus, COVID-19, lives on them. This data will allow libraries and museums to develop procedures to safely reopen.

OCLC is maintaining a [webpage](#) for the REALM (**RE**opening **A**rchives, **L**ibraries, and **M**useums) project. The original discussion of the project can be found in Town Hall 13.

In Town Hall 24, the question of how long people plan to quarantine materials arose. Initial thoughts ranged from 24 hours to 5 days. Some pointed out that different material types (e.g., books vs. plastic jewel cases) may require different quarantine times, based on scientific findings.

References:

Town Hall 24: 16 June 2020
Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020

Updated: 24 June 20

Staff development and training

I'm working from home for the first time. What can I work on from home?

Early on in Town Halls, people discussed what they were doing to support staff in their new work-from-home environment. It was acknowledged that some staff can't complete the majority of their regular tasks at home. Providing practical opportunities, such as working on performance reviews or reviewing web content and other often "back-burner" activities, was discussed.

In Town Hall 2, libraries learned that Meg Massey of Penn State University Libraries was working on a virtual learning resources document that interlibrary loan practitioners could use and share with their employees. The SHARES Best Practices Working Group reviewed the document, it was discussed more in Town Halls 6 and 7, and people were invited to contribute any ideas or links they thought should appear in the document. The full document is available at [bit.ly/illworkathome](#).

Members also compiled a list of productive tasks for employees while working at home during Town Hall 6. For staff with computers at home and secure internet access, members suggested:

- Online chat reference

- Metadata projects, such as data entry and data cleanup
- Checking links on electronic resources pages
- Transcriptions of special collections
- Professional development webinars
- Receiving cross-training virtually

For staff who lack internet access at home:

- Professional reading in hard copy
- Writing or proofreading departmental documentation and training manuals

In Town Hall 13, the communication strategies were discussed. In these trying times, it was acknowledged that it's important to communicate with staff regularly to keep up morale. A few of the strategies discussed included:

- Have virtual meetings to check in at least weekly
- Reach out to individuals, as not everyone will be comfortable sharing in a group setting
- Acknowledge the stress and anxiety brought on by all the disruption and uncertainty
- Remind folks of the importance of self-care, and that it's OK not to be productive every minute of the day
- Share information about resources regarding access to self-care, counseling, and support for those in need of food, shelter, and healthcare
- Plan some fun social activities (examples: sharing photos from home of pets; Ohio State's Zoom Pictionary May Madness Tournament)

References:

Town Hall 13: 7 May 2020
Town Hall 7: 16 April 2020
Town Hall 6: 14 April 2020
Town Hall 3: 2 April 2020

Updated 25 June 2020

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