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North America's Public Libraries Implement Bold Measures to Serve Communities During COVID-19 Outbreak

Public libraries are acting decisively to meet their communities' needs as the coronavirus pandemic escalates.

WASHINGTON – Public libraries are on the front lines of the coronavirus outbreak in North America's communities. As COVID-19 has an increasingly devastating impact on education systems, economies, job markets and race and social equity, libraries are taking a leading stance in strengthening community resilience and helping all citizens safeguard their health, stay connected and maintain stability in their lives.

"As the coronavirus outbreak rapidly changes our world, the work of public libraries is more vital than ever before," said ULC President & CEO Susan Benton. "Libraries are innovating on the fly to offer robust online programs and services, working closely with schools to keep children engaged in learning and bravely stepping in to support local relief efforts."

While closed to the public, many library facilities have transformed into temporary shelters and service points for local emergency response activities. Library buildings for some systems, such as Spokane Public Library (Wash.), are serving as [short-term shelters for homeless individuals](#). [St. Louis County Library](#) is partnering with St. Louis Area Diaper Bank to offer drive-thru diaper pickup to families in need at several library branches.

Libraries are actively engaged in gathering and providing supplies and staffing to support community relief efforts. Ontario's [Milton Public Library](#) is leveraging its 3-D printers to create PPE face shield headbands, supporting a mass-production effort [led by InkSmith](#), an education technology company. Oakland Public Library (Calif.) is asking community members [to use the Main Library's book return bins](#) to drop off unused face masks in sealed packages.

Public libraries also act as vital sources of reliable community health and safety information, offering guidance through special web pages, newsletters, call and chat services, social media and other

channels. Systems such as [The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County](#) offer extensive online guidance about trusted sources for health information and best practices for helping to slow the spread of the disease. Libraries are also filling a vital local news gap, keeping citizens informed about the latest impact of COVID-19 on their community. Do Space, a technology library in Omaha (Neb.), keeps an up-to-date [online list of operating hours and services for local grocery stores](#) during the pandemic.

While educating the public and supporting relief efforts, libraries are also working aggressively to overcome access and service barriers. Libraries across North America are:

- Reimagining scheduled programs as online experiences via livestreaming platforms, allowing individuals to participate in library events from the safety of their homes.
- Partnering with school systems to support distance learning for students and their teachers, including equipping students with online library cards.
- Expanding the availability of e-book and e-audiobook titles offered by the library online.
- Extending the due dates for borrowed materials and suspending overdue fines policies.

Visit urbanlibraries.org for more information about public library responses to the COVID-19 outbreak.

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About the Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems. ULC drives cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions for the 21st-century. One hundred sixty urban member libraries in the U.S. and Canada rely on ULC to identify significant challenges facing today's communities and provide new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, digital inclusion, workforce and economic development, and race and social equity.