

Public Library Pandemic Response

Frequently Asked Questions

As per the *Libraries Act*, the library board is the legal entity that, “subject to any enactment that limits its authority, has full management and control of the municipal library” (Section 7). It is vital during these emergency times that the library board continue to make decisions about library service to ensure the safety and well-being of library users and staff. It is also imperative for the board to work closely with municipal council and administration, and the Province, in the best interests of the community.

To that end, here are some answers to frequently asked questions we are receiving:

Should public libraries be closed?

Yes. On March 17, 2020, Alberta’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Deena Hinshaw issued a directive stating that “Albertans are prohibited from attending public recreational facilities and private entertainment facilities, including...libraries.” ([Full transcript](#))

In light of this directive, library boards need to officially close their physical doors. Notifications should be posted on the library’s various social media and web sites. Boards should also connect with any partners (e.g., municipality, school, library system) to collaborate and advise on further steps.

If your board has an emergency and/or business continuity plan, now is the time to implement it.

What if my library is located in a school or joint use facility?

Public school facilities in Alberta were ordered to close to students as of Sunday March 15th so co-located libraries likely found themselves closed before other public libraries. It also may be the situation that these libraries’ facilities can open earlier or later than freestanding public libraries. This could be the same dynamic for public libraries co-located in recreation facilities.

As per section 7 of the *Libraries Act*, library boards are responsible for public library service delivery. It is important to keep that in mind. Equally important is to collaborate with your partners in decision-making. Be sure to consult your joint-use/lease agreement for anything that might be relevant at this time. This may include:

- Clarity around roles of school/rec centre staff and library staff as it pertains to the library
- In cases where the board and school employ the same person, ensuring all parties know what their role is when relating to that staff person
- Clear expectations about access to the library—especially relevant if one entity is able to open before another in a co-located physical space

In short, be a good partner, and be sure to have substantive discussions with partner organizations so that expectations are clear for the interim crisis and for recovery of services after services can resume in the physical location.

Can library staff continue to work on site?

As the employer, the library board has the authority and the responsibility to make that decision. When doing so, consider the following questions:

- How do we protect employees from the risk of transmission?
- How do we limit the risk of spreading the virus in the workplace?
- How do we ensure critical aspects of service continue if possible?

This decision is not a “one-and-done” exercise. It is important for the board to continue to monitor the situation and reassess as new information becomes available and/or new measures implemented.

Where employees can work from home, they should as per Alberta Health recommendations.

It is also important for the board to consider how it will re-establish service once the crisis has passed.

How should libraries handle paying staff during closure?

As the employer, the board is responsible for making this decision. If you have an agreement with the municipality to do payroll on your behalf, consult with them ASAP to ensure minimal disruption for staff.

Explore available support. In recent days, both the federal and provincial governments have introduced programs of support:

- Federal: [Economic response plan](#)
- Provincial: [Supports for employers; supports for Albertans](#)

Can the library offer limited in-person service, such as service by appointment or schedule pick-ups?

As per the directive referenced above, the public are not permitted in the library—not even for limited time periods (like appointments).

At this time, most boards in Alberta have decided NOT to offer any in-person or physical service. Given the risks involved, the best practice would be to offer virtual services where possible (e.g., phone reference, IT support for e-resource access, and e-content).

Promote your library's available digital resources, and those offered by your regional library system, including those available to all Albertans through the provincial e-content suite:

- Pronunciator (language learning),
- PressReader (world newspapers),
- RB Digital Audiobooks,
- RB Digital Magazines,
- the *Read Alberta Ebooks Collection* (a partnership with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta) which includes the *Prairie Indigenous Ebook Collection* and
- electronic resources for the print-disabled through NNELS and CELA.

How can a library continue to support the community at this time?

Promote your library's available electronic resources and remote services. Ensure your library users are able to easily access those resources, either through

your library's website or, if applicable, your regional library's website/catalogue.

Maintain a virtual presence in your community by continuing to communicate through your library's website and social media sites if you can.

The board should also be mindful of the needs of all residents of the community at this time, including those who may need additional supports to access virtual service, such as those with disabilities or with limited or no access to the internet (which may include remote Indigenous communities that boards have providing service with/for).

Patrons with print disabilities continue to have access to thousands of digital accessible-format items through both [NNELS](#) and [CELA](#). If you are having trouble registering a patron for NNELS because you do not have access to your ILS, please contact NNELS directly at support@nnels.ca or 1-888-848-9250 (option 5) to have them registered manually.

If possible, maintain some services such as reference or information services via telephone—either by forwarding the library's number to another number or giving patrons an alternate phone number to call. Not everyone has a computer or internet access, so having alternative means of access to service is important. If you do this, it is best to have the phone answered by a human, not a machine. In a period of social distancing, personal contact on telephone or virtually is important.

Should library boards continue to meet?

Yes, when it is possible to do so safely. This will mean the board will be meeting remotely for the foreseeable future. Fortunately, there are a number of options available for online meetings such as Google Hangouts or Zoom.

Regardless of which tool is used, it is important for boards to continue to fill their role. Just because the physical location is closed does not mean the board's work ceases. In fact, this is a critical time for boards to be discussing options and future plans. The current situation remains fluid, with new developments occurring daily. Boards need to

continually reassess and be ready to make decisions, sometimes in very short order.

My Library board has begun holding meetings online. Do these meetings still need to be made open to the public? If so, how do we do that?

Library boards in Alberta are governing bodies that make decisions in the public interest and spend public tax revenue. All library board meetings, online or in person, should be made open to the public as per section 5(1) of the Libraries Regulation to ensure transparency in board decision making.

Many online meeting platforms allow participants to join online meetings via a website link or email invitation. Library boards should share the method of joining the meeting with the general public. This could be done by posting the meeting link on the library website or posting the contact information of a staff person who could share a meeting invitation.

Where can I ask further questions or find additional support?

In the midst of this crisis, we encourage boards to lean on the provincial Public Library Network for knowledge and support. There are over 220 municipal and intermunicipal boards in Alberta, each currently facing the same challenging situation.

Reach out to your fellow board members and library staff across the Province—there is a wealth of knowledge out there. Of course, your regional library systems also are there for support, advice, and help in service delivery.

Additionally, you can:

- Encourage staff to join the [APLAC email list](#) where library administrators are sharing lots of ideas for business continuity.
- If your board is a member of the Alberta Library Trustees Association (ALTA), pose your questions to fellow board members on the [ALTA Trustee Forum](#)
- If you are a member of the Library Association of Alberta (LAA), utilize your list serve and social media chat rooms to share ideas.

- The Alberta Library (TAL) partners with the Ministry of Education to offer virtual educational resources for teachers, parents and students that will be especially useful now. Lorisia MacLeod is the Online Reference Centre (ORC) coordinator and she is happy to set patrons up with access. She can be reached at lmacleod@thealbertalibrary.ab.ca.

Finally, please continue to forward your questions to PLSB staff. All PLSB professional staff are working remotely and are available to answer any questions you may have.

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