NSW PUBLIC LIBRARIES

the COVID-19 response

Report of a survey into how library services adapted to a pandemic

STATE LIBRARY®
NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW PUBLIC LIBRARIES

—

the COVID-19 response

—

Report of a survey into how library services
adapted to a pandemic

August 2020

Prepared for the
State Library of New South Wales
by Brendan Fitzgerald

641 DI

Building Social Connectedness

STATE LIBRARY®
NEW SOUTH WALES

This report is available on the State Library of NSW website www.sl.nsw.gov.au

Cover image courtesy of Blacktown City Libraries:
Richard James, Mobile Library, receives a token of appreciation

CONTENTS

COVID-19 TIMELINE

Late December 2019	The World Health Organisation (WHO) receives reports of a 'pneumonia with an unknown cause' cluster in Wuhan, China
January 2020	The virus spreads internationally in mid-January, first to Thailand then to the US, Nepal, France, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and beyond. Australia records its first case of coronavirus on 25 January
31 January	WHO declares the virus outbreak a 'public health emergency of international concern'
12 February	WHO officially names the new coronavirus as COVID-19
11 March	WHO declares a global pandemic
13 March	The National Cabinet is established to coordinate a national response to the COVID-19 pandemic
15 March	The Australian government bans gatherings of more than 500 people on 15 March and indoor gatherings of more than 100 people on 18 March
17 March	International travel from Australia is banned
20 March	Australia closes its borders to non-citizens and non-residents. Social distancing measures are implemented. Minimum space requirements (four square metres per person) are imposed for non-essential gatherings
23 March	Australia starts to lockdown. On the advice of the Department of Premier and Cabinet the State Library of NSW closes to the public
25 March	Prime Minister Scott Morrison announces further restrictions on a range of businesses and institutions, including libraries and galleries. Australians are advised to stay at home unless shopping for essentials, travelling to and from work, going to school or exercising
28 March	All arrivals into Australia face mandatory hotel quarantine for 14 days
30 March	NSW begins Stage 2 shutdown of businesses and non-essential activities. All NSW public libraries are closed to the public under the *Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order 2020*
Mid April	COVID-19 case numbers in Australia begin to decline
8 May	The National Cabinet agrees on a 3-step plan to bring Australia out of the crisis and into a COVID-safe economy
15 May	The NSW government eases restrictions on outdoor gatherings and allows cafes and restaurants to re-open with limited seating and social distancing measures in place
1 June	Further easing of restrictions in NSW allow libraries to reopen to the public with social distancing measures in place

Sources: Grattan Institute coronavirus announcements tracker; World Health Organisation

FOREWORD

NSW public libraries

Public Libraries in New South Wales are provided by local councils with assistance from the state government through the State Library of NSW.

In 2020 there are 363 public library buildings, 23 mobile libraries and over 50 other outlets which provide library services. The library settings range from dense urban communities and regional centres through to sparsely populated rural areas. Public library services across the state are sophisticated and multi-faceted, providing diverse collections in many formats, modern technology (including free internet and Wi-Fi access) and offer programs and events which are responsive to local community needs.

The State Library of NSW works closely with public libraries across the state under the *Library Act 1939*. Our services include allocating state government funding for libraries, internet connectivity, online content, collection support services, advisory services, and policy and research services.

Scenario planning

The State Library convenes the Strategic Network Committee, which comprises a representative group of public library managers from across the state who are tasked with monitoring trends and discussing emerging issues. The Committee initiates research and acts as a reference group for statewide public library projects.

In 2009 and 2014 the State Library's Bookends Scenarios projects developed a list of emerging trends and possible future scenarios for libraries and devised a framework for monitoring and responding. Presciently, a global pandemic was one of the possible future scenarios suggested.

A feature of these projects was the development of framework comprising seven strategic domains which may be used as the lens to analyse the effect of scenarios on public libraries. The strategic domains are: community engagement, professional development, resourcing, branding and identity, leadership and influence, governance and regulation and resources.

This project

COVID-19 has of course presented a considerable challenge for NSW public libraries, however it became clear very early in the pandemic that libraries were adaptable and innovative and were endeavouring to continue to serve their communities.

The State Library noted that library use in NSW increased remarkably during the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/08. This extraordinary usage continued for two years after the GFC, likely as a result of higher unemployment, and because people had less disposable income. The economic effects of COVID-19 are predicted to be worse than those of the GFC.

This unfolding situation, and likely medium-term effects for libraries, prompted the State Library to scope research into how public libraries are coping and adapting, with a view to assisting libraries and advising the government on the response and needs. Input was sought from the Strategic Network Committee, and 641 DI were commissioned to run a survey and prepare the results that form this report. Further research will be scoped in the near future.

Cameron Morley
Manager, Public Library Services
State Library of NSW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public libraries in NSW have adapted and innovated in response to the challenges that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

90 public libraries responded to this survey developed by the State Library of NSW and 641 DI, including metropolitan, regional and rural library services, providing a detailed and highly representative snapshot of the state of play.

The report describes how libraries initially adapted to balance continuity of service with community safety and gives examples of the nimble responses that many libraries exhibited in response to council and government directives, while being mindful of community expectation.

The survey asked respondents to look back to the initial period of the pandemic when libraries were open and adjusting, then to describe their services during lockdown, and then talk about reopening and future services.

The responses indicate the commitment of public libraries to continue to provide services within the ever-tightening confines of the pandemic in the first half of 2020. Service changes to facilitate public access included extended loan limits and periods, swift pivoting to online delivery of reference services and public programs, significantly boosting ebook collections, implementing direct communication channels with library users and communities, and implementing home delivery and/or *click and collect* access to collections. The commentary provided by respondents about how these services were so quickly scoped and implemented is insightful and demonstrates both the resilience of the public library sector and the depth of need that the community has for library services.

> *We focused on keeping the community connected with our services, enhancing communication with our users and stakeholders, as well as developing staff agility and skill with project work and delivery of new services during the closure.*

> *Once we accepted the longevity of the shutdown, the team quickly moved to get programs and learning activities online setting themselves high quality production targets and using the existing budgets to partner with local creatives that were otherwise severely disadvantaged; the member engagement and customer care phone support kept all staff connected with the community. Over 8,000 outbound and inbound calls completed.*

As library buildings began to open after 1 June 2020, libraries describe how they modified their spaces and onsite services to comply with COVID-19 Health Orders, while continuing with the volume of remote services that their communities had quickly adopted.

The report includes data in response to a questionnaire, comments from respondents and a series of questions for future discussion. This is particularly important because the situation is still unfolding, and it is likely there are more changes ahead.

Respondents also identify key gaps that were difficult to fill during the period, such as reaching people who aren't online, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, skills shortages among some staff in online delivery, and the role libraries play in providing critical indoor public space for isolated people.

Library staff worked with other departments of council to set up a phone support service for community members who would normally take part in council programs and services and who may otherwise be socially isolated or have difficulty accessing shopping, medical appointments etc.

Respondents also identify some barriers that have arisen after reopening including variable compliance among some library users with social distancing rules, and a heightened sense of anxiety among other readers and members.

We are in the process of designing a new space and it will have to take account of the potential need to provide service in a pandemic- space to socially distance in everyday use and at programs.

In conclusion, the experience of NSW public libraries over the March to July 2020 period has inspired the development of a range of responsive services 'on the fly', many of which will likely become part of the standard suite of library services at least into the medium term. The list of questions for further consideration that have arisen from respondents suggest a range of next steps for addressing, and the State Library looks forward to working with public libraries on practical solutions.

The speed with which our staff pivoted and started developing high quality online content, was amazing and outstanding.

I was astounded on a daily basis at the remarkable staff I work with — they are resilient, enthusiastic, unstoppable, resourceful and downright incredible. We worked together and changed and adapted as every day was different. New challenges with delivery of service was never a problem.

I do think we need to 'think differently'. I anticipate more funds to be invested in digital resources but also, I believe we need to offer more to different groups – 'social expansion' if you like. People need people and we are well positioned to extend our programming and events.

INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty has become the new global norm in 2020. The world is now living in a liminal moment - an in-between time, which doesn't feel like anything we've ever known. We are unsure and out of kilter. A time between times, where no one knows what will come next.

Living with increased uncertainty is something public libraries in New South Wales have been preparing themselves for since 2009, when the first iteration of 'The Bookend Scenarios' was published.[1]

Revised in 2014, with 'Building on The Bookend Scenarios', this scenario planning work has given public libraries in New South Wales a number of tools to assist them prepare for and manage change through the uncertainty of four different scenarios. These tools include a set of Early Warning Indicators (EWI) designed to alert them to the emergence of possible alternative futures. Many of the libraries across NSW have been actively monitoring these indicators based around the four scenarios for some time.

In building those scenarios, a series of questions were initially posed as thought starters. One of those questions in fact identified a global pandemic as a possible causal factor forcing change on how libraries work.

Does the fear of health pandemics make the library an unsafe place to be?

As such, to be dealing with the consequences of a global pandemic should have been no surprise to public libraries in New South Wales, as it was identified as a low probability but high risk 'wild card'. It was seen as having the potential to break long-established service models for libraries with particular consequences that would bring change.

People avoid physical objects and busy spaces.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact all communities across the globe for some years to come bringing many alternative futures. The long-term impact of the pandemic on public library services, and how they will continue to deliver their services is unknown. How they will change, adapt and evolve beyond the pandemic is a very open question with no clear answers.

This report provides analysis of the 2020 survey of New South Wales public library services, exploring how libraries in NSW responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was developed by the State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW), in partnership with Library Consultancy 641 DI, along with much valuable input from public library managers across New South Wales.

The aim of this survey was to capture information on how public libraries in New South Wales (NSW) coped with the lockdown. How they responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic while that experience remains fresh, was a key driver. Those issues include such things as; identifying barriers and challenges encountered; 'on the fly' solutions; understanding how they were supported, and who supported them; exploring what changes occurred to services and staffing during the closure; identifying gaps that may have opened up; and looking forward, to anticipated impacts on budgets and operations into the future.

---

[1] Neville Freeman Agency & Freeman, Oliver & Watson, Richard & State Library of New South Wales 2009, *The bookends scenarios: a project exploring the possible futures for NSW public libraries in the year 2030*, Library Council, Sydney

It is anticipated that this report will inform further and wider research and planning considering the effect of the economic downturn on our communities, and the role that libraries will play. Where possible we have included direct quotes and comments from respondents, so as to capture their lived experience as best as possible in their own words.

The results will be used to assist public library services strengthen and innovate post COVID-19. In that context this report does not incorporate recommendations as such, rather it highlights a number of '**considerations for future discussion'**. These are designed to inform planning for the SLNSW and the public library network across New South Wales into 2021 and beyond.

> *It has been an interesting journey and the library team has learned much. This learning is not lost and we will take this into the future. We have also grown in confidence in our skills and ability to learn and adapt.*

Survey methodology

The methodology employed a 30-question survey that was sent to NSW public library managers. The objective being to gather data as quickly as possible, while libraries are still managing the crisis. The survey questions were developed with input from the SLNSW Public Library Services team, NSW public library managers, working with library consultancy 641 DI.

The survey used a mix of open-ended, multiple choice, and rating questions designed to identify themes and trends emerging from the pandemic. Most questions, including the multiple choice options, incorporated a space for open comment. This allowed respondents to provide a comprehensive context with their responses.

The questionnaire was structured in four sections with the core questions covering three distinct time periods, being:

- **Section 1 – Looking back** – the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic (from 1 March until 30 March when the public health order was made to close all public library buildings).
- **Section 2 – How did your library adapt to the immediate changed situation and what helped you continue to operate during the pandemic?** (while all public library buildings were closed by public health order from 1 April – 31 May 2020).
- **Section 3 – Looking Forward** – What does the 'new normal' look like? (beyond 1 June 2020 with library service planning and delivery).

The research team utilised SurveyMonkey as the online data capture tool, with the link to the survey being emailed to NSW public library managers on 17 June 2020. The survey closed input on 30 June.

Responses

A total of 96 survey responses were received of which six where deemed invalid as only the first two questions on type of library and library size were answered. Of the 90 valid, 75 were complete with responses to every question and fifteen were partially completed, with most questions answered. At least six library services completed more than one survey. These have been included as the commentary from these responses is a valuable contribution in the context of the purpose of this survey, i.e. to inform future planning.

Note also, that for some questions, respondents referred to library branches as well as library services. As this report is primarily concerned with identifying trends and themes for future discussion, these responses have also been included as they will not impact the integrity of the data in that context.

Library types and cohorts

Q1. Describe your Library

Q2. What is the size of population served by your library?

A total of 90 responses came from a broad cross section of library services which provided a good representation from the three library cohorts in New South Wales being:

- Rural library
- Rural Regional Library Member
- Metropolitan library services.

In some cases, such as the metropolitan sample, a number of duplicates have been included as they came from unidentified library services where it appears more than one staff member has completed the survey. Given the nature and intent of this survey that input, albeit duplication, is seen as valuable data and was included in the analysis. The number of returns from the library libraries were as follows:

- 35 Rural
- 23 Rural Regional Library member
- 32 Metropolitan

If we did a simple country versus metropolitan (which takes into account the regional libraries) then the split is 58 country and 32 metropolitan.

LOOKING BACK

The immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic
1 March until 30 March 2020

Library closures

Q3. Did your library building close to the public before 30 March 2020?

The majority of respondents (94%) closed their library buildings prior to 30 March. This decision was guided by advice from NSW health authorities. Some libraries closed earlier in anticipation of a direction from health authorities to close, and at least one started preparing for closure a week prior to that advice.

We closed from 24 March. A week prior we reduced all our services and only allowed borrowing and returns at all branches.

Some local government authorities pre-empted the directive from NSW health authorities and directed closure earlier, with around 18% closing prior to 23 March. Just over 72% of libraries surveyed closed in the period between 23 to 25 March.

Five libraries (5.75%) closed after 30 March with two libraries reporting that closure was not until the 6 April and 18 April respectively[2].

Two library branches were already closed for renovation when the pandemic hit and library and council management in both cases decided not to reopen on the designated dates.

Our main branch was closed Friday 13 March for a scheduled repainting. Council agreed to not reopen the main branch and cancel scheduled children's programming for the smaller branches.

Closure of NSW Public libraries by date

Note: This table includes a mixture of library services and branches.

---

[2] Although the response stated 18 April it is likely the respondent meant the 18 March.

The decision to close was a difficult one for all libraries, and often required the necessary involvement of multiple stakeholders, who in some cases where very reluctant to close.

Council was very reluctant to do anything other than 'business as usual' and would not consider closing prior to the mandated health order.

As well, libraries that had regional relationships, including some that had cross-state border considerations to take into account, had to navigate a situation that had never been experienced before in New South Wales.

The decision was made to close the library the same week the Victorian library which provides admin support and collections closed.

Considerations for future discussion

- How can the public library network work together ensure that a unified statewide approach is achieved as best as possible?

- What would we do differently if we had to do this again?

- Given the *Bookends Scenarios* highlighted that libraries would be unsafe places in a global pandemic what plans did we have in place to prepare for this? How should we adjust that?

Managing community/staff response to the pandemic

Q4. How did your library manage community/staff response to the pandemic prior to closure?

In the lead up to the closure of public libraries across New South Wales, library management reported implementing a number of changes based on daily advice from NSW Health. Libraries also reported looking regularly for guidance from NSW health authorities and local councils in making what were significant, and unprecedented service adjustments leading up to, and including the 30 March closure.

We followed NSW Health directives and guidelines and provided reassurance to staff based on the evidence rather than hearsay.

How did your library manage community/staff response to the pandemic prior to closure?

Category	Value
Ceased Programs (e.g Storytimes, author talks etc.)	15
Restricted/Closed Access inside library e.g Shelves not...	8
Spacing of furniture, Limiting access to PCs (Time and...	12
Book Returns Quarantined	5
Changed ILMS parameters (e.g Loan periods...	3
Communication with Community and Users	40
Social Distancing Practice implemented (e.g floor signs...	17
Increased Sanitation (e.g wiping & cleaning of stock,...	28
Wearing of PPE (e.g gloves, masks)	5
Focus shift to Online Information services	2
Click or Phone and Collect Implemented	4
Relaxed Housbound service criteria	1
Implemented New Communication and support...	9
Began planning for Lockdown (e.g staff redeployment,...	16
Home Office Preparation	5
Staff Covid 19 Training	1

Public libraries across New South Wales used all their skill, knowledge and resources at this time. They did so without a clear or shared understanding that they would likely close at a future, as yet unknown, date. Nonetheless, through this uncertainty a multifaceted response manifested in across three key areas:

1. **Communication** – to the community, and internal with staff.
2. **Increased focus on health and safety** – for community and staff.
3. **Future planning** – from adjusting systems to be more flexible through to identifying new tasks and planning for staff redeployment during lockdown (and beyond).

The response in relation to community members and users had a clear focus on communication. This was both with, and to their communities and users about the closure and its implications. There was also an equal and related focus on customer health, with increased sanitation and cleaning and implementation of social distancing practice.

Libraries used a wide range of communication tools, from online (e.g. Facebook, social media), through to traditional means such as noticeboards and newspapers. A clear concern about community members who may be vulnerable or didn't have access to ICT, emerged as a gap (see question 8), and how to ensure they were communicated with was a challenge. Some libraries began phoning individual library users as part of a customer care approach.

Over 7,000 inbound and outbound customer care calls.

Only one library however, reported communicating directly to CALD communities as a focus, where six posters in community languages were developed. This could be an area where greater statewide cooperation in future would serve to increase effectiveness of communication with CALD communities.

The safety of our staff and our community was quickly identified as our number one priority and this was a key component of our messaging.

As the seriousness of the situation became more apparent, a number of libraries reported reducing or ceasing public programs, or activities where groups would normally gather (e.g. author talks) in order to keep library users safe. Some libraries relaxed eligibility criteria for housebound use, thus allowing more users to take advantage of this service.

Most libraries made adjustments to building interiors to encourage social distancing where they could. This included removing shelving and furniture, spacing PCs further apart, removing toys and Lego, and introducing social distancing signage.

As well, libraries reported a significant focus on implementing increased cleaning. This included regular sanitising and quarantining of returned stock, as well as, provision of community sanitising stations, and staff wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

In the context of likely closure, a number of libraries reported making changes to library systems such as alterations to LMS loan periods and fines (i.e. extended and waived). A strategy designed to relieve or reduce future pressure points.

Lifted loans to 30 items per person. All loans extended for the period of the closure and late fees will not be charged

Many libraries reported that the staff response centred on planning for closure and lockdown. Some of the activities included preparing for staff redeployment, identifying new tasks, working more closely with council risk and business continuity planning (BCP) teams, and setting up systems for staff to work from home. One library reported working closely with local aged care facilities in planning continuity of service to some of their older library users.

Tasks for the lockdown period were devised and divided among the team. Home offices were established so work could continue behind the scenes.

Many library services and councils were deeply conscious of the mental health impact on staff and indicated that they directed resources to this area. Some included highly practical approaches, such as ensuring staff with children had working from home agreements in place so they felt confident they were supported, or raising awareness of other external support services staff could use.

Council put considerable resources towards supporting staff emotionally through this process, constantly providing updates on what was happening, their rights and entitlements, the support services available.

Many libraries reported a significant increase in staff communication such as, adding daily briefings, weekly CEO emails, regular staff updates, and ensuring that all staff were involved in planning processes.

Daily meetings were held to discuss current situation and updates. All staff were involved in discussions and planning of alternate business models and hygiene practices.

The uncertainty also meant that some library services felt that they were less well informed, and as a result felt that the anticipated closure or reduction of service had caught them unprepared.

There was very little communication as we were ordered to close the library within a three-hour time period.

Considerations for future discussion

- How can communications in CALD community languages be improved across all libraries?

- How well did we communicate with our communities and what weaknesses were exposed?

- What can we do to improve communication?

- Did those libraries that increased internal communications and staff engagement position themselves better for the closure?

Preparedness

Q5. How prepared was your library for the pandemic?

On average, most libraries felt that they were reasonably well prepared.[3] At one end of the scale, around 2.3% of respondent libraries stated that they believed they were highly prepared, whilst at the other end, close to 10% stated that they felt they were not prepared at all for the pandemic. However, many libraries that said they were unprepared did indicate that they felt they responded proactively and adapted quickly to the situation. Quite possibly the scenario planning work undertaken by public libraries in developing the Bookend Scenarios from 2009 through to 2014 gave them a framework and mindset to allow this to occur.

Although we were not prepared, we very quickly adapted to the situation. Council had in place a Crisis Management Team that quickly provided support

Being highly prepared for a crisis doesn't necessarily mean having a specific crisis in mind. The ability to be able to apply and adapt learnings from a crisis other than pandemic certainly equipped some libraries to deal with COVID-19. For example, some libraries that had had experience of bushfires or floods were able to draw on that experience to guide them during the early stages of COVID-19.

Council had recently updated their emergency procedures due to the bushfire crisis in January. Although the Pandemic was different the procedures put into action at each Council site were able to be changed slightly to suit.

We were aware the library would have to close so there were certain things we knew to do because of previous closures due to flooding.

Many libraries that acknowledged not being prepared for the pandemic did however feel that they responded to the pandemic with flexibility and confidence. For these libraries the government advice and council directives were utilised as the key decision-making guideposts.

---

[3] Weighted Average across all responses was 5.00

Decisions were made quickly based on government advice and Council directives.

Some went further and recognised the need for a more planned approach as they progressed further into the uncertainty of the pandemic. Many took the opportunity to put plans in place that helped them meet the immediate challenges of the crisis and position themselves for what would be new models of service (e.g. click and collect).

We did not have a plan in place prior, but immediately worked on alternative ways to serve the community and put a plan in place to provide an increase in all online services as well as making videos and working out ways to provide a click and collect service.

Others that had detailed plans in place found that they had to revise them quickly. They did feel though that they were in a position of some control as they could act on those revisions and prepare clients and staff for change.

The council had a business continuity plan and all departments prepared a plan in early March. Our council had a Traffic Light plan – Yellow, Orange and Red – and we went to the Yellow stage on 16 March and progressed to Orange – closing the library – the week after. We had plenty of time to prepare both our clients and our staff for the procedure.

Considerations for future discussion

- How did the work done across the network in developing '*The Bookend Scenarios*' help in responding to the pandemic?
- Did those libraries that have detailed plans in place fare better than those that didn't?
- What further skills are required to improve planning capability for NSW public libraries?

Business continuity plans and their effectiveness

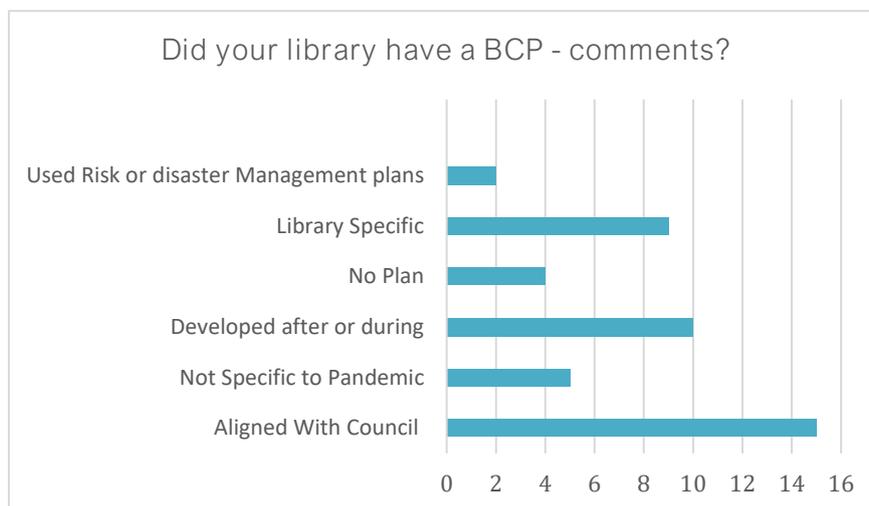Q6. Did your library have a business continuity plan?

Q7. Please rate the effectiveness of your business continuity plan in responding to COVID-19.

The majority of library services in New South Wales (61%) reported having a business continuity plan (BCP) in some form prior to the pandemic.

Approximately 34% reported not having a plan in place and 3.5% were unaware or responded that they didn't know if they had a BCP.

Most libraries commented that they were aligned with part of their council's plans. Although many had not specifically incorporated provision for a pandemic, they felt that having the plans provided them with a number of tools at their disposal to aid in managing the response.

The business continuity plan was extremely valuable, even though a pandemic was not one of the scenarios. There were plans and templates to cover critical staff allocation and make risk assessments across all areas of service.

Did your library have a BCP - comments?

Category	Value
Used Risk or disaster Management plans	2
Library Specific	9
No Plan	4
Developed after or during	10
Not Specific to Pandemic	5
Aligned With Council	15

Having a BCP also meant that libraries had a base to rebuild, or refocus very quickly, even without the specifics of a pandemic as the cause of the crisis. It would appear also that a large percentage of the plans in place prior needed to be updated or rewritten as the pandemic developed. Some also looked to risk or disaster management plans to help in providing a framework to respond to the pandemic.

An existing business continuity plan focused on dealing with disasters (such as flood or fire) or loss of access to power addressed very few of the issues associated with the COVID pandemic. A new plan was developed that included risk assessment, impact on operations and priorities for response, as well as a phased approach to maintaining, reducing, discontinuing or enhancing services and programs, along with opening hours, staffing, safety precautions, etc.

Many libraries that didn't have plans, did however report that they were able to respond and act quickly and appropriately. Often the position of the library in a bigger body, such as the local council, meant that support and actions could be coordinated as part of a broader council response.

Another theme emerging from the comments, was that a number of library services that didn't have plans quickly prepared one. In some cases, neither the library nor the council had a plan in place, and found they needed to put the work in to create one very quickly.

Initially the Council did not have a plan. Very quickly a business continuity team was established. The library followed Council protocol.

Considerations for future discussion

- How did having plans in place such as BCP or disaster recovery plans assist in responding to the pandemic?

- Did those libraries that without plans experience additional challenges as a result?

- What would the key elements of a statewide or universal plan or checklist look like?

- Are there relationships or skills that could assist in building stronger business continuity in the future?

For those libraries that had business continuity plans in place most, over 60%, felt that they were effective. Of note, over 16% rated the effectiveness of their business continuity plans as close to highly effective. This was despite the fact that pandemics weren't specifically included as a cause of the BCP crisis.

It is not designed for a pandemic situation but more for natural disasters, power failures and system/internet/intranet problems.

Many commented that although they hadn't incorporated a consideration of pandemic, that the plans and templates they had in place could be adapted to assist in managing the pandemic.

The business continuity plan was extremely valuable, even though a pandemic was not one of the scenarios planned for. There were plans and templates to cover critical staff allocation and make risk assessments across all areas of service delivery.

Some felt that the plans in place were not written in alignment with the resources available to deliver the actions of the plan, e.g. council vehicles not available or cleaning supplies not in stock. This made a measured response more complex, as the resources available were less than the plans required. In some cases, council guidelines were seen as a constraint, and in a couple of cases. councils themselves were seen as providing directives that in effect overrode the plans intentions e.g. directives to open earlier.

Constrained by Council guidelines. Resource deliveries to/collected by patrons on an ad hoc basis. No council vehicle, or time in lieu to service borrowers.

A number of respondents highlighted that as COVID-19 is a new virus, very little is known about its behaviours, such as modes of transmission, and how long it lives on surfaces etc.

However, the plan had not really considered a pandemic and how the virus could survive for 3 days on plastic etc...

The question of libraries themselves as potential places for transmission and a spreader of the virus was highlighted. As the nature of libraries are in essence, places of social gathering rather than social distancing, this in itself was and remains deeply challenging for library services to deal with.

Mainly for short term disruptions where the libraries would be needed and not for this extended period where libraries could be part of the transmission.


Considerations for future discussion

- How do libraries manage into the future as places of social distancing?
- How do we avoid or manage when political directives conflict with planning imperatives?

Sourcing reliable information

Q8. Did you know where to get reliable information about COVID-19 to assist in managing your response?

Libraries reported with confidence in the reliability of their chosen sources of information about COVID-19, with 94% stating that they knew where to get reliable information about COVID-19. In the lead up to closure on 30 March, public libraries primarily looked to two key sources for information about COVID-19. These were NSW Health and the State Library of New South Wales.
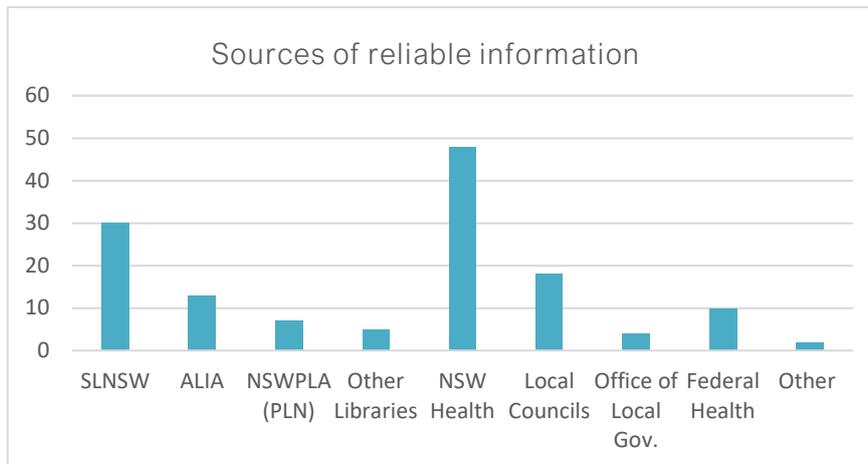
Most reported that NSW Health and SLNSW were highly trusted as sources of information to guide service delivery through the uncertainty of COVID-19. NSW Health was specific to the pandemic and health matters, and the latter was more to do with how libraries should interpret and implement that information from NSW Health. A clear interconnection existed between these two information sources although the fluidity of the situation meant that some perceptions of conflicting information or information not being up to date was experienced.

There was a level of conflicting information on COVID-19. The State Library of NSW played a key role in highlighting and distributing important information to NSW Public Libraries.

The major issues highlighted related to speed of publication of information, and the fluid nature of the information as the pandemic worsened. In some cases, this led to difficulties in interpretation and differences in interpretation.

> *SLNSW and State Govt NSW had information available, but slow to be published, often contradictory and changed at the last minute requiring very quick adaptations and changes. It was clear that lots of libraries were interpreting the recommendations differently.*

Some libraries felt challenged, not so much by not having reliable information sources, but that some information simply did not exist. This was especially the case with how long the virus stayed on surfaces and library materials in particular. For example, until research was published in mid-June indicating that the virus was undetectable on library materials after three days, no-one really knew how long materials should be quarantined for.[4]

> *It was a little difficult to get information on how library items should be quarantined.*

As well, the sheer volume of information that was directed at libraries created challenges for library staff, as they felt they had to sift carefully through it in order not to miss critical information. This was a time-consuming process and included much unwanted communication, such as supplier marketing materials seeking to sell PPE.

> *Many sources and some were conflicting, and there was a lot of panic in some quarters so had to sift carefully through the available information.*

Libraries also relied heavily on their local government authorities and councils for information as well as other libraries. These included both direct neighbours, and the broader public library network, especially via the PLN listserv and other network communications.

> *All libraries also kept in touch with each other through the public libraries network, helped each other, and everyone knew what everyone else was doing.*


🧠 Considerations for future discussion

- Do we have the right local and professional frameworks to accurately source and share information in a crisis?

- Do we know how effective our communication to community is during crisis?

- What other international library specific research sources exist to help identify how to manage health matters in libraries?

- Should we invest in more research specific to libraries?

- Partnerships with publishers – how can we develop these for collective impact?

---

[4] Institute of Museum and Library Services, 'Research Shows Virus Undetectable on Five Highly Circulated Library Materials After Three Days'.

Identifying service gaps

Q9. What service gaps did you identify?

What service gaps did you identify?
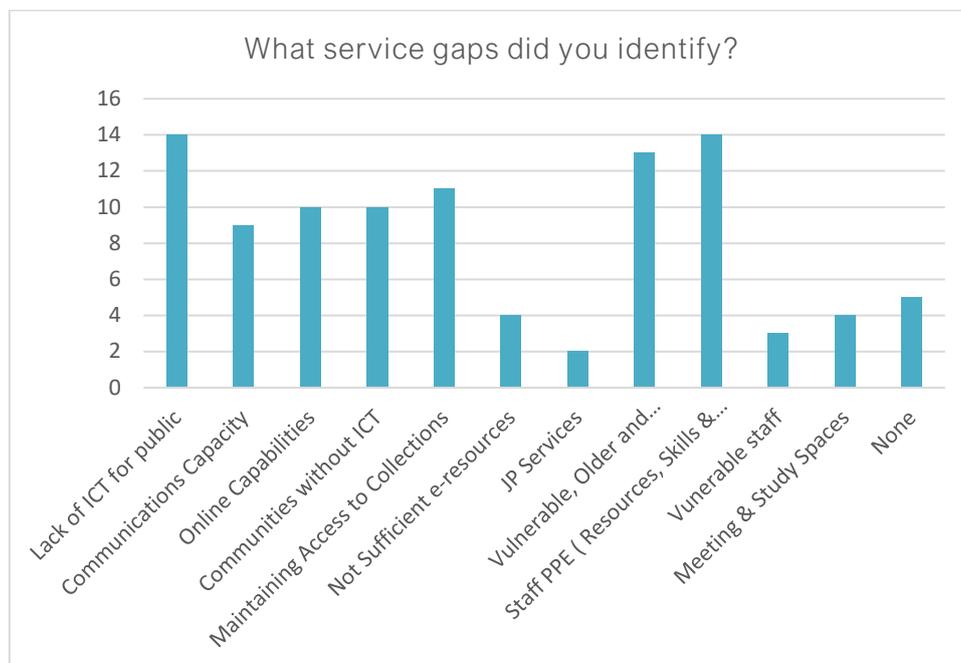
In the early stages leading up to closure several gaps were identified by respondents. These included gaps that libraries mostly anticipated would emerge from the closure. Some were more immediate, such as the need to source and implement new cleaning regimes for both users and staff. Some libraries highlighted not only gaps in sourcing PPE but also how to use that equipment and the information required to train staff to work safely.

> *Reliable and timely information on how long virus remains on surface. What service could be provided safely i.e. outreach and processes to put in place, skills in social media, PPE health equipment availability and how to use appropriately.*

There was a broad spectrum of concerns from libraries as to gaps appearing in service delivery. These included some very specific ones, like the fact that closure would mean libraries offering Justice of the Peace (JP) services would no longer be able to do so, or that some library users would no longer have access to ICT. Given more people were needing to engage with government services for example, this became a significant gap for both the libraries offering public access PCs, and for individuals needing to use that ICT.

> *The main service gap for us once we closed was going to be the lack of availability of public access computers and printing/scanning services. This was at a time when people needed to complete online forms to access superannuation etc.*

These quite specific gaps reflected a strong concern that those most vulnerable in society would be highly impacted by a lockdown. Respondents specifically identified older people, people in aged care and those who are housebound. However, a broader spread of community should be included such as: those on low income, those living with a disability, Indigenous Australians, and refugees, etc.

The need to supply services to the aged and vulnerable who may not have access to eResources and had been advised to isolate.

In particular, those surveyed recognised that those without ICT or social media, and the associated digital skills, wouldn't be able to take advantage of the online communication tools to understand what was happening. Equally, not having access to ICT also meant that they were not able to utilise the eResources and online programming that was emerging from many libraries at this point. This didn't stop libraries from coming up with solutions though. One library reported setting up a postal reservation service with doorstop delivery.

The main gap was being able to continue to provide a library service to those who weren't digitally connected or literate. We introduced a postal reservation service and doorstop delivery service in order to try and fill these gaps.

For some libraries, their own preparedness to have systems in place that supported their own vulnerable, or at-risk staff was identified as a gap. Staff with underlying health conditions (including volunteers), or those who were in the high-risk age category form a significant part of the library workforce.

Preparedness for dealing with vulnerable staff.

Libraries were also wrestling with the emerging gap of how to maintain access to their collections. This was not unrelated to the concerns that vulnerable and disadvantaged community members were likely to be the hardest hit by this lack of access. Some began developing click, or phone and collect services to fill this need, and others began looking to new points of distribution for collection items.

Other outreach services, meals on wheels, foodbank, we discovered new points for distribution.

Library services also indicated that there was a skills gap, especially digital skills. They recognised that these skills had to be bought into play quickly as some libraries needed to update their online presence and shift almost entire operations to digital. This included the updating websites and increasing cataloguing of eResources, through to delivering storytime via the web. For those that were looking to do more programming online, they needed to assess the skill gaps so as to make this move work well. In this case film skills or theatre experience was identified as a skill that libraries could utilise.

There's a definite gap in our marketing and promotional approach – also, in the general area of outreach, and the specific area of filming.

Respondents indicated that online capability was a gap with some complexity that included both finding the skills and/or capacity to focus on communications with their communities, as well as the capability to ramp up online service delivery rapidly. With the closure, what was a balanced library service with online and in-library offerings needed to switch rapidly and almost exclusively, to online only – in effect a completely new model of service.

Online services and communication of these resources to the community needed to be strengthened. We weren't set up to deliver storytimes/programming online. This all had to be created and prepared.

A small number of respondents felt that no gaps had emerged in these early stages of the pandemic. It is unclear why this was the case for some, given they had either closed or were about to.

Finally, the change itself has highlighted that customer expectations could be an emerging gap and how they are managed will be important for libraries beyond COVID-19. This is in the context that severe and abrupt changes were made to what was the longstanding model of library services and as a result customers may have lost some confidence, or trust in libraries. Many would have been confused by the rapid change of service. How this impacts customer relations into the future will likely be important to understand.

Our customer service model had to be reconsidered and staff found this difficult to process as it was contrary to what we have been working to develop for many years. Also the customers were also used to receiving high levels of service and they also found it difficult to adjust to a new world order.

Considerations for future discussion

- Can we imagine a future where those vulnerable people living in our communities can be fully supported?

- What does that look like, and how do we get there (can we get there)?

- What do we need to make that change?

- What new skills do we need and who are the partners that could help us?

- Our valued role as both community gathering places and community ICT conduits were impacted through the closure – how can we reimagine these and keep/evolve our position relevant into the future?

- What damage has our reputation taken (if any) as a result of the closure?

Identified risks

Q10. Were any risks identified when COVID-19 hit?

Respondents identified a large number of risks across the seven strategic domains identified in the '*The Bookend Scenarios'* ranging from community engagement and professional development, through to resources and resourcing. Seventy-eight libraries responded to this question and twelve skipped the question.

Risks by Strategic Domain

Strategic Domain	Risks identified by respondents
Community Engagement	• Limit number of visitors/users • Loss of community & customer engagement • Loss of social connection for more vulnerable community members • Isolation for those who rely on the Library for social connection • Inability of some uses to engage online • Services that require contact between staff and community • Inability to deliver computer help while maintaining social distancing. • Difficulty with social distancing at children's programs
Professional Development	• Cleaning and PPE use • Working from Home — for staff and community
Resourcing	• Ineligibility of some staff for JobKeeper • Staff meaningfully employed • Welfare of staff including mental health • Loss of Volunteers • Vulnerable staff and services that dealt with vulnerable • Financial impacts — decreased income from venue hire, programs, overdue fines
Branding & Identity	• Potential inability to meet customer expectations in a very fluid environment • Perception of libraries as 'non-essential' • How to maintain the profile of the library in this environment • Being open was a risk with library as a virus spreader • Our whole philosophy was the library as a community space
Leadership & Influence	• Planning for future including re-opening • Lack of disaster planning for pandemics
Governance & Regulation	• Understanding of the science of how long viruses live on library materials • Social distancing among staff and users • Quarantining of returned items • Safety and cleaning of libraries • Misinterpretation of health information • Compliance with legal and contractual matters
Resources	• Community owned assets including buildings not being used and protection of assets • Lack of interest in online programming • Relatively low uptake of eResources prior to COVID compared with physical resources • That our eLibrary and the borrowing of eResources wouldn't 'cut it' for many customers • Difficulty getting hand-sanitiser • Layout of staff workrooms

More risks are likely to emerge as the pandemic continues, especially if a second wave hits and additional lockdowns are mandated for either the state or local areas, as occurred in Victoria in July.

Everything was a risk. Our whole philosophy was the library as a community space.

Considerations for future discussion

- Are unknown risks able to be managed?

- Did we have the right mix of mitigation strategies, or were there risks that we didn't see emerge?

- How do we do risk management better, and what risks are yet to be identified?

CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

How libraries adapted to the immediate changed circumstances
1 April – 31 May 2020

Working situation/conditions for public library staff

Q11. Please describe the working situation/conditions for your staff during this period

For many libraries the core mission of delivering information services to their users didn't change, even with closure imminent. A total of 216 responses were given from 80 individuals across NSW public libraries. They indicated that a mixture of changes to working conditions for staff were implemented in a very short period of time, and a variety of human resource options were used.

All staff were employed throughout, and only vulnerable staff went on leave. Non-vulnerable staff could elect to go on leave.

Working situation/conditions 1 April - 31 May 2020
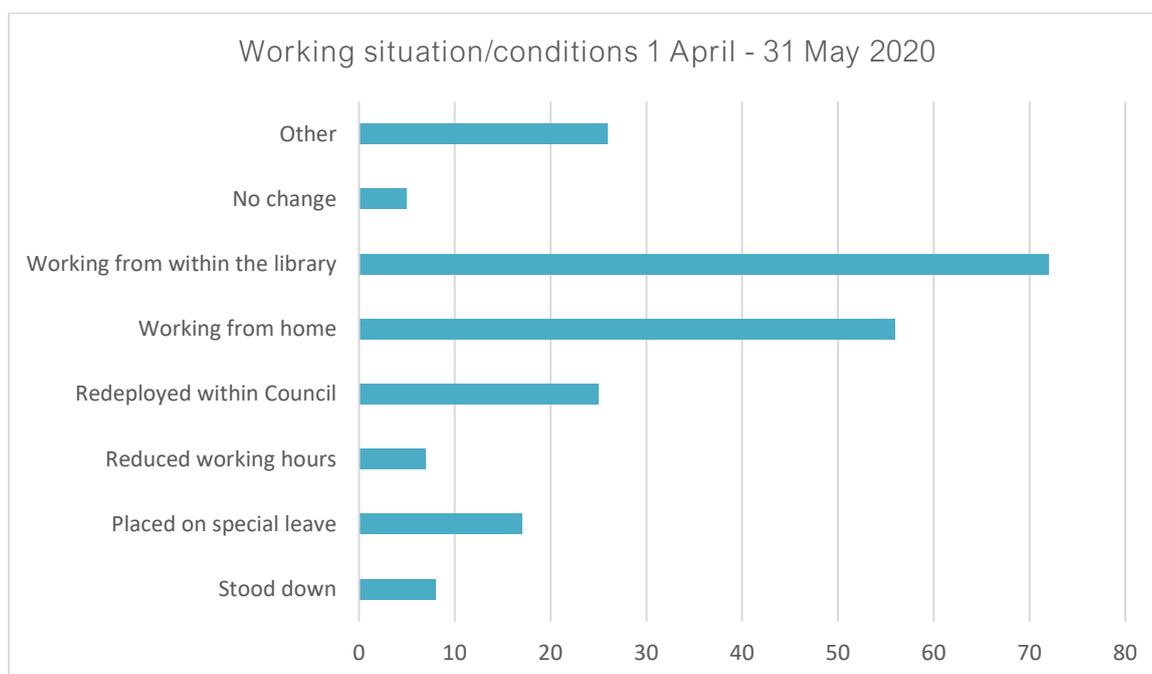
Some staff were stood down (4%), with others placed on special leave (8%), while only 3% reported having to reduce staff working hours.

Just on 12% of staff were redeployed to work in various council areas from the very early stages, including planning, community engagement and cleaning services. This created a valuable opportunity for libraries to be exposed in a crisis situation to council staff who may have previously had a limited view of the value of libraries as a council asset. A couple of libraries also reported that some council staff were redeployed to the library for tasks such as library collection deliveries.

The library service led the way for Council. Other Council services used our scenarios and planning documents to prepare to reopen.

Most staff were kept working either from home where possible (26%) or continuing to work from the library (33%). The majority of those staff working from either home or the library were involved in a rapid transition of library service to more online activities.

Considerations for future discussion

- Were we more flexible and agile than we thought we were? How could we use this flexibility in the future?

- When change is forced on us, do we adapt quickly because our profession is about understanding information and we are 'old hands' at making order out of chaos?

- How fast did we make this change to online, and are there any key learnings from this shift?

- Did we find staff had skills we didn't realise they had? If so, why didn't we know about them?

- Did the uncertainly allow us to feel more empowered to experiment or did we fear failure?

Adapting service delivery

Q12. Please rate how well you believe that your library and your council adapted to deliver services to your community.

Using the weighted average there was very little difference between how library management rated the response of the libraries (8.26), as compared to how they rated the response of their councils (8.08). This likely reflects that most libraries have a close working relationship with broader council operations, especially areas such as community services, building assets, Information technology (IT), and Human Resources (HR).

> *Teams all across Council worked collaboratively to achieve a successful outcome that allowed staff to be productive and supported. The community were kept well-informed and were generally most appreciative of Council's and the Library's response.*

Many respondents commented on the nature of the work they did to adapt their services as a result of COVID-19. They key move was to digital.

> *Immediately switched to online programs. Increased online resources.*

The variety of online services in this early stage of the pandemic included storytime and programming that at a fundamental level could be delivered with a camera and access to the internet. Libraries did explore other digital activities as well. For example, Facebook was used in one case to continue an English conversation class online. Another library reported developing a Lego club online with some success. That library reported less success with another experiment with an online code club. Libraries were also heavily involved in making more eResources available, and this included new subscriptions or working with vendors to increase access.

Staff moved to virtual Storytime sessions very early, as well as moving Language Cafe (English conversation classes) onto regular Facebook sessions. We subscribed to Newsbank to replace physical newspapers, shared a virtual Little Bang Discover Club, and expanded the number of ebooks and promoted the eLibrary collections.

Not all libraries were able to adapt to online as easily as others, largely due to low digital capability. The willingness of library staff to adapt and meet this challenge, despite limited capability, was also noted.

The library was underprepared for pivoting services online. Our eResources were limited and staff digital skills low. However the staff rose to the challenge.

The other key reinvestment of staff time that helped libraries adapt was undertaking tasks that could be described as more traditional. These included, stock management (e.g. stocktakes and weeding), or expanding existing services such as housebound, or the click and collect offerings that were emerging.

We focused on keeping the community connected with our services, enhancing communication with our users and stakeholders, as well as developing staff agility and skill with project work and delivery of new services during the closure.

A number of libraries redeployed staff to act effectively as a call centre, recognising that for many, the telephone was a key means of communicating and maintaining lines of communication with community was vital. Even if it meant going back to the telephone as a means of communication.

Once we accepted the longevity of the shutdown, the team quickly moved to get programs and learning activities online setting themselves high quality production targets and using the existing budgets to partner with local creatives that were otherwise severely disadvantaged; the member engagement and customer care phone support kept all staff connected with the community. Over 8,000 outbound and inbound calls completed.

There were a few libraries who felt that they, and/or their council didn't adapt very well. Issues such as inability or slowness to update information on opening hours, lack of council and library coordination, poor internal communication, and not having clear communication across all platforms for the community were cited as examples. There was concern that opportunities to adapt through such things as whole of community home delivery, or more promotion of online reference services has damaged the 'library brand'.

As a library, we missed opportunities to adapt and position ourselves as an essential service during lockdown. We did not expand and offer our home delivery service to the whole community and we did not promote online reference services. We simply increased our digital content and streamed programs online. Fear as a team inhibited our innovation. Lack of communication with the public damaged our brand.
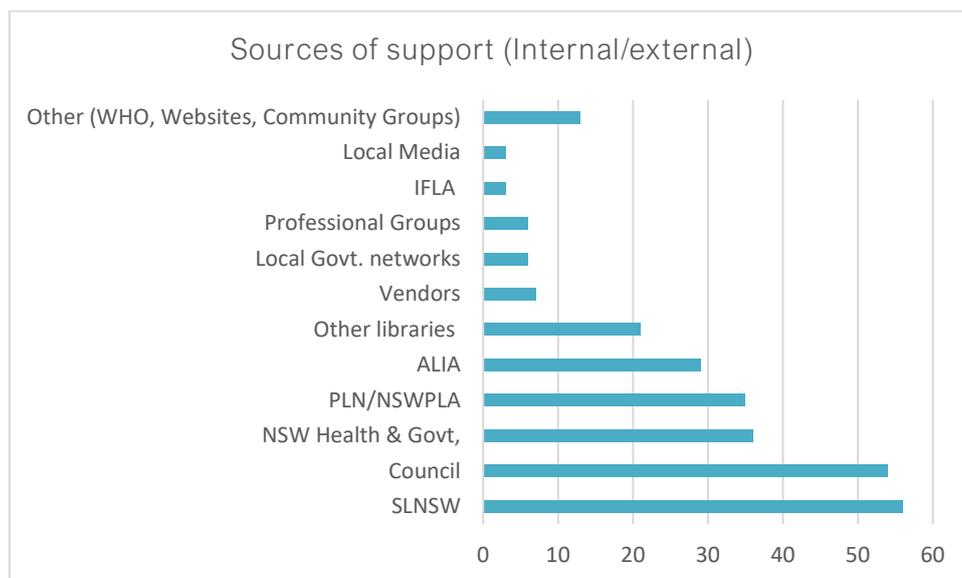
Sources of internal and external support used by libraries during the COVID-19 shutdown

Q13. What sources of internal and external support did your library use during the COVID-19 shutdown?

This question was largely interpreted by respondents (n=77) as support in the form of information communications and guidance. In most cases multiple sources were selected by respondents (Ave. 3.6). A few libraries did mention financial support in the form of small grants to increase eResources, but by far the support most valued was information in how to manage the pandemic.

We felt we were better informed and a bit ahead of the rest of Council's staff, thanks to the information we received via State Library, ALIA and NSWPLA.

Sources of support (Internal/external)

Source	Value
Other (WHO, Websites, Community Groups)	~13
Local Media	~3
IFLA	~3
Professional Groups	~6
Local Govt. networks	~6
Vendors	~7
Other libraries	~21
ALIA	~29
PLN/NSWPLA	~35
NSW Health & Govt,	~36
Council	~54
SLNSW	~56

The sources of support identified, whether internal or external, correlated strongly with where libraries sought reliable information[5]. The type of support regularly mentioned included clear and regular communication, health and safety guidance and professional advice. These were seen as the most important form of support by respondents. By far the most relied upon were multiple parts of individual council operations and the State Library of New South Wales.

Shellharbour City Council – especially the Crisis Management Team, Customer Service, IT, HR, Risk, Communications.

In some case the support from local councils was reciprocated.

Staff from parts of Council unable to continue with usual operations were redeployed to make library deliveries.

Other important external support was the moral, collegial, and professional support provided by the public library network and neighbouring library services. This was seen as almost as valuable as advice from NSW Health. A few libraries also highlighted the support from professional bodies, most notably ALIA, as well as various other professional working groups, including IFLA from an international perspective.

Other public library managers (this was the BEST source of external support).

The financial support from the NSWPLA to add to library eResources was welcome, as was assistance from a number of vendors in opening up resources.

Small amount of money from NSWPLA. Free resources from Overdrive. Home access to Ancestry. Access to the Emergency Library.

One library did highlight financial loss as an issue. This may yet become a much larger issue for libraries to confront, especially if the pandemic continues well into 2021 with the expected impact of a recession hitting communities and council budgets hard.

Very little support mostly just information certainly no money to cope with the loss incurred

The fact a few respondents indicated that they had sought support from organisations such as Work Safe Australia, and Headspace indicating that the need to ensure staff were looked after was also a concern. Understanding and promoting the broader mental health provider environment could be a role that libraries may want to broaden in the future.

Overall the early stages of the pandemic saw a network that supported each other, and councils that worked closely with libraries to ensure that the advice from SLNSW and importantly NSW Health were implemented professionally.

Council convened teams for specific risk measure requirements for staff however, public facilities (libraries) managed more on their own as the info from Council came well after library had established its own measures based on looking up NSW Public Health advice

---

[5] See Question 8

and ALIA site come on board with some terrific literature. NSW State Library PLN network was fabulous for libraries to all communicate too.

Considerations for future discussion

- What other support could we have sought?

- What types of support did we not fully leverage?

- Do we have stakeholders in our stakeholder environment that we could have called upon for support?

- How will the pandemic change the way we look to others for support, and what could strengthen our existing relationships?

- Could our role change in acting as a conduit for community mental health?

- Could we see what more was available from the experiences of other countries?

Level of support received

Q14. Did your library receive enough support to manage the crisis? Please add any comments about any needs that the available support wasn't able to help you with, or areas where improvements could be made in the future.

Overwhelmingly (86%) respondents felt they had enough support to manage the crisis[6]. This was critical as every aspect of the service had to be examined in an everchanging context as to whether it could be delivered safely or not.

In practice, we had to analyse every single service that we offered and either adapt processes or suspend the service based on whether it could be delivered safely.

For those that felt the support was lacking, it was on issues such as councils being seen as risk-averse and not wanting to panic people because they felt that they didn't have enough information in order to confidently communicate with certainty. As well, the information from NSW Health at various stages may have been different from federal health agencies, and/or being delivered at different time intervals, thus making decision-making and communications difficult.

At the start we did not receive much support from our own Council as they did not want to panic people however once the lock down health orders were announced they were very supportive.

As support was linked heavily to information, communication, and moral support, we need to be mindful that as the pandemic unfolds with potentially further waves of infection, support relating to financial assistance, as well as staff health and wellbeing issues could become a much more significant need than it appeared to be in these early stages.

---

[6] Support was largely interpreted as information and communications support as per Q.13

Barriers and issues to delivering library services

Q15. What barriers and issues emerged to delivering library services?

Respondents (n=71) identified a wide range of barriers and issues emerged for their library services as the pandemic developed. These are captured against the strategic domains identified in 'The Bookend Scenarios', and they run along a broad spectrum, from management of resources and the rapid shift to digital services, through to working with various community attitudes and understandings of the pandemic.

> *Some people were not compliant with distancing rules which we had to remind them.*
> *Some were not too worried about the pandemic. It was just another flu.*

Although a barrier can be different from an issue, both require solutions to be developed in order to overcome them. In that context, a separation of what a barrier is, and what an issue may be, hasn't been made at this stage. Respondents provided a long list from their collective experience. Some have been resolved and solutions found, and much can be learned from further exploration and drilling down into the detail of this unique experience.

> *Hell is in the details. We were constantly having to change things to meet new COVID*
> *orders. Staff numbers due to excess leave requirements and the unavailability of casuals.*
> *Vulnerable volunteers who didn't want to stay away. But mostly time. Initially we had a*
> *plan for what we could achieve while closed but had to rethink that fairly quickly as*
> *keeping services running kept us time poor.*

Barriers and issues identified by public libraries

Strategic Domain	Barriers & Issues
Community Engagement	• Increased the risk of exposure to the virus • Forced to close with short notice • Closure for aged persons - short lead time meant that we could not alert this cohort prior to closing • Concerns with how the customers who are homeless would spend their day when we closed • Public space and social distancing – closures and restrictions • Physical loans unavailable and programming and activities cancelled • Inability of some patrons to access online resources • Communication to deliver messaging quickly to community members • Accessible communication for some community members • Seemed to be easier to prepare and deliver storytimes than programs to adults • Trying to cover all audience groups • Increase in users – people who usually wouldn't have time to read suddenly had time • Community attitudes and responses to the pandemic varied • The pressure to reopen and provide a full service was becoming an issue especially as the cases started to decline • Don't currently have a good outreach program in place
Professional Development	• One of the biggest issues was learning how to bring programs online. Which platform to use and do we have the skills to do it? (digital service delivery, project conception and implementation) • Only one staff member had the editing skills required (we are now training more staff) • Staff anxiety levels and how to give staff the tools to deal with this
Resourcing	• Staff shortages – some staff elected to take leave, casuals stood down, short on staff to provide the services • Access to technology (e.g. laptops for staff WFH) • One technical issue that emerged was council advising staff not to use zoom for programs as there are encryption and hacking issues with it • Volunteers disappointed to be unable to continue • Increase of time spent reorganising service delivery • Library2U was very popular and managing the driver roster was often a challenge • Health of staff e.g. dealing with staff sickness going into winter season • Anxiety levels were high among the team and so it was difficult to mobilise them to adapt to offering new services and reopening to the public • Capacity within the library website to deliver online programming • Much higher work loads • Some staff working from home felt isolated • Some staff were nervous about working or not wanting to be at work • Staff dispersed - working from home, library, relocated to council and redeployed as well as required annual leave • Leave, change of hours for weekend staff, etc. while maintaining some services • With no staff on site, some staff were upset when they were aware that other library services had staff on site. • Not everyone was able to work from home on library related projects • Single staff library. Community had higher expectations which could not be met • Setting up new online resources with IT under pressure to cater for people working from home and issues within council
Branding & Identity	• Competing with diverse social media marketing by other large organisations to deliver to the 'stay at home' market • Communication of what services the library was offering to some members of the community

Strategic Domain	Barriers & Issues
	• Inconsistencies in service delivery across the state – affected public expectations and perceptions of service levels • New members online signup – some thought they couldn't sign up as we were 'closed' so promoting service to new people was an issue • Strong reliance on the physical buildings by us and customers • Our library doesn't have its own social media accounts (Facebook etc) so we had to rely on the council's comms team
Leadership & Influence	• The crisis has been managed by the business continuity team • Ensuring that Council knew that we had sufficient valued tasks that we could do in the library • We didn't know how long we should plan things for
Governance & Regulation	• Uncertainty as to what services we were permitted to deliver – Constant changing of the situation • Council restrictions which inhibited delivery of outreach and online services • Approvals (timeframe) required before delivering new delivery methods • Internal approvals for reopening were often frustrating with short timeframes to apply for service changes or resumption approval, with long timeframes waiting for approval • Copyright issues with children's storytimes – ongoing concerns we will have to remove this content • Did not have a business continuity plan • We had never considered infection control measures in a library context • In the beginning a lot of uncertainty around work stability and the method of transmission. This caused a lot of stress and anxiety • Risk-averse council leadership • Council not listening to us in reinstating outreach services whilst closed
Resources	• Amount of time spent designing and creating online content (e.g. videos) • Loss of library as a public space open to all was significant for many community members and was impossible to replace in an online environment • Communication delays/lack of response from vendors/providers when trying to set and up and deliver changed services (e.g. online content) • The relatively low pre-pandemic uptake of eResources compared to physical resources • The high cost of adding additional eResources • The one-copy/one loan model by eResources platforms continues to be a constraint to eLibrary delivery and resulted in long wait times • Limitations of the LMS - moved quickly to click and collect but the LMS limited the efficiency of this for some • Physical stock – sanitising and quarantining • Money as we were at the end of budget cycle budget cuts over next four years • Availability of PPE, split guards (perspex screens), alcohol-based hand sanitiser • The selection of resources for 'no contact' deliveries, cleaning and ironing the cloth bags each day was time-consuming for a small team

These barriers and issues identified were not experienced by all respondents. The list captures the broad nature and the range of situations encountered by library management. All of which required innovative solutions to be developed to ensure that service could be best delivered in the context of the pandemic.

We created a Pop-Up Library at home for the most vulnerable in the community who could not use eResources or leave their homes. This was rebranded good quality donations, curated to their reading likes after a staff consultation on the phone and dropped by the Library Courier.

Space! We divided the library into days of the week and put book bags to be delivered or collected into their allocated days – it was a bit messy but we managed. Having our own library car helped. We also found that we seemed to be working much harder than normal as we had to select the books for the bags, rather than the clients spending their time selecting their materials, and we just checking it out!

Considerations for future discussion

- Were we stronger in some domains than others?
- If so, why?
- Were there any issues or barriers that couldn't be overcome?
- How do we plan to better anticipate future issues and barriers?

Adapting library services

Q16. What did you do 'on the fly' that surprised you?

Respondents (n=73) reported that a large amount of new activity that was effectively 'done on the fly'. Through necessity and driven by the pandemic, a whole new model of library service was in effect invented and delivered overnight. This was done without detailed planning, road-testing of products and services, and the bureaucracy and necessary permissions that usually come with the introduction of a new service, or a change to service.

The library website and catalogue became our face and our plan to revamp them was fast-tracked.

Many respondents were surprised and pleased by the speed at which the change happened and the fact that it was largely driven by the agility shown by staff. This included such things as, how quickly staff were redeployed into new and meaningful tasks, and the professional manner in which this occurred.

Each day brought changes as we identified better ways of doing things.

The speed with which our staff pivoted and started developing high quality online content, was amazing and outstanding.

The majority of respondents identified the shift to online programming, or digital promotions as the area where the most significant change occurred.

The switch to online programs for children was rapid and managed beautifully, the increase in social media and online platforms was good too.

Not all changes involved online, and not all tasks were new and exciting. Some libraries were able to take advantage of the closure to complete stocktakes or shift more resources into local history digitisation projects. Some chose to deliver IT support for community members by phone or proactively engaging with vulnerable members over the phone with IT help.

In some cases, being a small library turned out to be an advantage as they knew the community and library users and their needs intimately, and could therefore tailor individual solutions.

We are small so were able to call and discuss needs of members and called all regular vulnerable members to advise of closure and make individual plans for accessing materials during closure.

Area of library operation	New activities 'On the Fly'
Digital	• Shift of resources into delivering more via library webpage (e.g. redevelopment or new sections or sites such as a Library At Home website developed) • Updating library membership area of the website to make it easy to join (e.g. removed barriers such as proof of address) • Online Code Club and LEGO Club (via closed Facebook groups) • Online storytimes & other children's programs such as Online Baby Rhyme Time. • Online Anime drawing competition, Easter Bonnet parade and PJ Storytime (outside normal library hours) • Sent out craft packages to pre-schoolers and infants • Online Brain Games (a daily puzzle or activity) • Videos created for online distribution • Writers' Group online also (closed Facebook group) • Introduced LMS mobile app • Delivered tech help via telephone for those in need • Over 50's Zoom Book Club (shift from in-library group to online) • Stay home & read delivery service to seniors 65yrs + (280 seniors serviced) • Gardening seminars hosted online via Zoom • Author Talks Online (e.g. One Book One Wagga moved to a virtual event with pre-recorded author interview) • Provided online school holiday programs • Provided JP services online • Created a Flickr account to make out photos more accessible – and this will continue • Introduction of Library YouTube channel • Developed Local Kids Local Stories package using the library's local studies collections to assist in the teaching of NSW K-10 History syllabus, exploring family history and family life, local history and buildings • Transitioned our annual children's writing competition to online submission and expanded scope to include teens • Sponsored the development of a publication on the Verses poets in residence program, keeping the poets connected with the library and the program • Boredom Busters Facebook post and webpage slider including adult BB
Collection Access & Management	• Phone/Click and Collect service introduced (many libraries reported this) • Provided a vehicle for the popular Print and Collect • Expanded home library service and eligibility criteria • Rearrangement of parts of the collection (aligned with social distancing) • Overdue fees and reservation fees were temporarily removed • Extension of all customer loans to reduce customer anxiety about non-return of library items • Established a Seed Library, in partnership with Slow Food Hunter Valley and attracted over 400 registrations for Seed Library membership • Successfully moving library frontline staff to a range of library and museum projects including library stocktake, museum collection stocktake, photography of museum collection items, scanning of historic Shellharbour Images collection items • Redirected collections budget to eResources with that collection accounting for 53% of loans by end May

Area of library operation	New activities 'On the Fly'
	- Subscribed to new eResources such as Beamafilm, Story box Library and Newsbank. World Trade Press, BorrowBox, indyreads - Stocktake of entire collection completed - Cleaning books – library items were decontaminated before leaving the premises and all returned items were quarantined for 72 hours - Established a Pop-Up Library @ Home - Archiving projects actively worked on and great headway made - Weeding the collection in preparation for moving back to our regular library location
Information Service	- Developed a new approach to respond to library enquiries with a new portal, categorisation of queries and templates to improve responsiveness of library to customers - Staff developed readers advisory lists for eCollections - Use of original and copyright free and in-house resources to give the site longevity past COVID copyright exclusions - Book Chat over a teleconference phone call
Partnerships & relationships	- Developed a stronger partnership with Headspace - We enlisted the help of the Resources Centre's volunteer group to deliver to our vulnerable users - We forged partnership with Transport Group to deliver Home Library Services - Partnered with Council's Customer Service team to provide phone support and after-hours call centre support - Assisted other areas of Council with translation services
Marketing and Promotion	- Huge increase in engagement via social media - issued eNewsletter more regularly - Taking a very targeted approach to social media with a COVID/lockdown/stay at home lens applied to all posts - Launched a new website and started sending bulk emails to Library members - Customer surveys online – library survey online capturing what people liked, missed and what new things they tried
Staff HR and Library Planning	- Several staff were redeployed to other areas of council smoothly and quickly - Staff deployed to community hub - Used Zoom to effectively have team meetings for all staff to participate in - Created an internal SharePoint site for all staff to access the ever changing COVID information - Worked across the team in a different way and created work groups that will probably stay in future - We used the deployment of staff from the Civic to both clean the books and the shelves, and also to train them in library procedures so we would have in the future a pool of trained casuals to call on if necessary

The need to act as a result of the pandemic raises a question of how far public libraries could push themselves to build new service offerings when not pressured. This is an exciting area to explore and there are no shortage of ideas to experiment with, as many libraries demonstrated.

Online programs – we will definitely keep doing this in one way or another eResources – incredibly popular – over 50% increase in eBook & eMagazine loans Your Tutor and TLO usage also went through the roof.

The ability for digital to offer greater economies of scale for libraries, as demonstrated by the uptake of online forced by the pandemic, could be an area to better understand into the future as spaces in

libraries will need to be reimagined (e.g. library space can only hold a finite number of participants but online can be many).

As well, the opportunity to explore what can be done by the library in time slots outside normal opening hours is worth highlighting as an associated opportunity (e.g. one library hinted that the online storytimes can be done outside library normal opening hours opening up new audiences such as working parents).

We usually offer three weekly children's services which with the pandemic shutdown was reduced to one online weekly program.

The speed of the transition was what seemed to surprise respondents the most, especially as a few libraries made the point that there are so many processes in a public library and these needed to be thought through in every circumstance. Even without a pandemic.

Entirely new service offerings were established very quickly with one library establishing a seed library for community members.

The seeds are selected online and distributed through the Click and Collect service. The cultivation of vegetables at home was good fit with community needs during the pandemic and the Seed Library attracted media interest from ABCTV.

As mentioned, some libraries took a more basic or traditional 'on the fly' approach utilising the opportunity to rearrange services and resources or developing a more user-friendly layout and workflow for staff and patrons. Others reported commencing and completing stocktakes or undertaking extensive weeding operations.

I wasn't really surprised by the library's agility as I feel we have a smart and responsive team who prioritise the community and always worked towards what we could do, with at times limited capacity.

The agility and responsiveness of the staff was in most cases seen as not surprising by the majority of respondents. They felt that a large percentage of staff relished the chance to engage in new activities, to test and experiment with new ideas, and to find new ways of proving their professional commitment to their communities.

Nothing surprised me rather I was delighted. The period has been an opportunity to strengthen the whole of team approach with twice weekly staff meetings to discuss latest development, showcase new initiatives, share the weekly cooking challenge, come together and share over Homeless training or Black Lives Matter, or the creation of the new Library Lounge. I knew that we had the capacity but I think COVID provided the motivation.

One of the key outcomes for some is that respect for the ability and professional skills of staff was highlighted. Through the experience of rapidly, and in some cases radically, adapting their service offerings as a result of COVID-19, the value of library staff across the state has come to the fore. A flattening of the management hierarchy was observed in some libraries which was seen as a positive outcome by allowing fuller use of the talent and skills of all staff.

I think some team members were surprised and pleased that the responses to their storytimes for example would get 1,000 live views and they received very positive feedback. There was a flattening of the hierarchy where all managers and coordinators were 'accessible' twice a week by everyone, no questions were silly and all answers were heard in the same way at the same time.

A number of library managers did highlight the enthusiasm and resilience of staff as a positive feature through the early 'on the fly' stages of the crisis. It is likely that professional development work will need to be done to build capacity and resilience as the pandemic stretches into 2021. As well, the issue of staff well-being will need some attention, as not all staff coped well with the uncertainty of having to do things 'on the fly' and the impact of the pandemic over more time may bring exhaustion and burn-out.

I was astounded on a daily basis at the remarkable staff I work with – they are resilient, enthusiastic, unstoppable, resourceful and downright incredible. We worked together and changed and adapted as every day was different. New challenges with delivery of service was never a problem.

Considerations for future discussion

- Would we have introduced these new services if we didn't have the pandemic?

- What happens if the pandemic gets worse and stretches over years?

- What have we learnt about the speed at which it could be done?

- Do we feel freer now to trial 'stuff' and if it fails not worry so much?

- Did we underestimate the agility and talent of the library staff?

- What else is possible?

- What PD is now required to ensure that the resilience shown by staff is further strengthened?

- Have we celebrated the achievements with our staff through the pandemic and how could we take the positive outcomes into the future?

Partnerships and collaborations

Q17. Did you work with any new partners, communities or stakeholders during the closure? If so, who were they?

Of those libraries that responded (n=78), just under half reported working with new partners as a result of the pandemic (42%). There was no perceivable pattern identified, other than it is likely that the change to online, or click and collect models, meant working more closely as required with new vendors and publishers, or courier services such as Australia Post. Some also worked with parts of community they wouldn't normally work with, for example, Meals on Wheels or council rangers to help with deliveries.

A number reported working with parts of their councils that they had previously had little to do with (e.g. council holiday staff redeployed to help with digitisation of local history collections, or council stores and cleaning services for sourcing cleaning products and advice on cleaning practices).

Teams from other parts of Council assisted with deliveries.

Working with other areas of council, such as Council's Customer Service teams, was seen as a great opportunity by some library managers to continue collaborating with those teams into the future.

An internal partnership was established with council's customer service team to provide a joint approach to enquiries from library customers. This resulted in a very successful and responsive service model which creates long-term opportunities post-COVID lockdown.

A couple of respondents mentioned the importance of working with the library and publishing industry as an area where new partnerships were either developed further or extended to allow activities that wouldn't occur normally. For example, many vendors extended copyright or remote access capability for their online offerings to support easier user access.

We increased our relationship with publishers for the delivery of online Author talks.

Some libraries that undertook stocktakes looked for new partners such as aged care centres or local charities to give the discarded material a second life and a new home. Often these encompassed partners that they may have had an ad hoc relationship with in the past.

Others sought out entirely new partners. One library developed a partnership with Slow Food Hunter Valley to establish a seed library. Another worked with a local real estate photographer to put an existing Paul Jennings exhibition online, which incorporated a virtual walk through. A third developed a partnership to capture images of the COVID-19 time, and another worked with a local theatre company to bring filming and performance skills to their online activities.

Slow Food Hunter Valley obtain seeds from local growers and provide expert information on planting, cultivating, harvesting and storing seeds.

Out local Regional arts group- developing a COVID photograph website for the community to record their photos of this time.

We worked with colleagues from the Theatre who assisted in our filming and undertook other tasks for us.

Some worked up new partnerships around youth services, whether though other GLAM sector agencies, such as a Children's Discovery Museum in one case, or through working with local youth advisory committees, or a young women in business group.

Considerations for future discussion

- What tools do we have to enhance our ability to map and understand our stakeholders?

- How do we build stakeholder mapping into an everyday activity?

- What value do we deliver to our stakeholders and partners? How can we enhance this as a result of COVID-19?

Marginalised and vulnerable groups of people

Q18. Did your library serve marginalised and vulnerable groups of people during your period of closure?

Close to 80% indicated that they provided some level of service to people seen as marginalised or vulnerable during the period of closure, and just over 16% indicated that they did not provide services.

Around 4% indicated that they didn't know. Given the shift of most services to digital it is possible that the 20% that indicated 'no', or 'don't know', were providing services de facto to some of these groups.

Disadvantaged groups served during closure
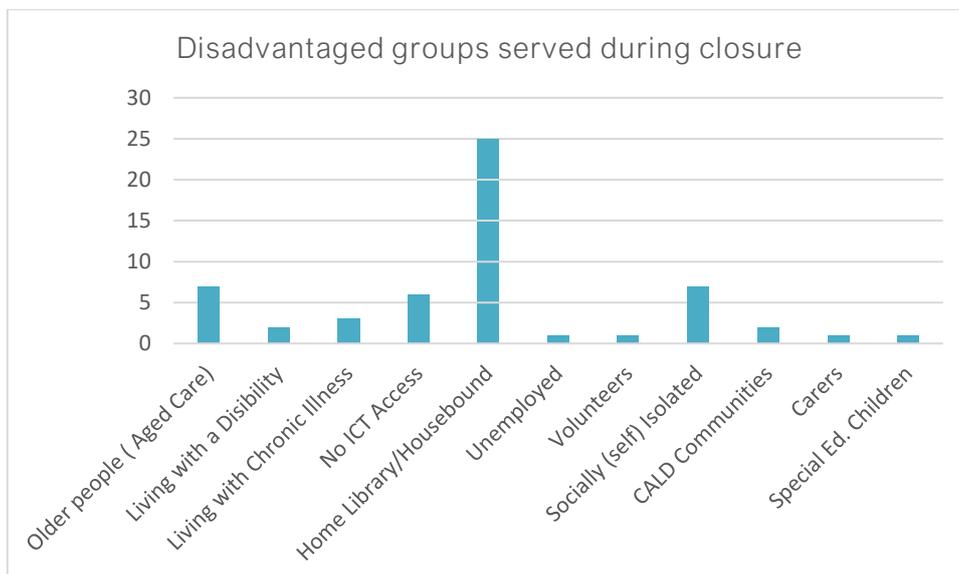
The most common way in which libraries were able to continue service to people seen as disadvantaged was centred on home library service (HLS), or service to aged care communities. One feature to note, was that many respondents with a home library service reported taking the opportunity to expand eligibility criteria, so they could include more people in this service.

We did multiple deliveries to the home library and expanded the criteria for all vulnerable people for home delivery.

Home Library continued to provide services as normal to frail, aged and homebound members.

One library mentioned that carers were included, as they support individuals within vulnerable communities. Potentially there is more that could be explored with libraries working with carers and carer organisations in the future.

Expanded home library deliveries to seniors, disabled, critically ill, and their carers.

There was a crossover for some groups, for example people that had no ICT at home and thus couldn't take advantage of the eResources libraries offered, were in some cases given priority for inclusion in the home library service. At least one library reported reintroducing a Home Library service.

Home library service was extended to all residents without internet. Wellbeing checks were done on members.

The issue of how to resource delivery to vulnerable and marginalised communities came up for some, with some libraries stating they had no resources available to serve vulnerable communities. Some respondents highlighted issue that providing or continuing service might actual be a risk in itself as it could help spread the virus.

We felt that the vulnerable were most at risk and we should be helping to protect them rather than expose them.

We are used to dealing with vulnerable groups, but in this instance, we felt that helping to protect them was more important than providing them with services.

The other issue was that many people who are vulnerable prove to be quite difficult to engage. This also highlights that libraries who had a specific outreach service, such as a home library service have a base from which they can ramp up (e.g. systems in place, experienced staff etc.).

Our Home Library Service was not suspended. The program was adjusted to manage the COVID-19 restrictions and risks.

Whereas for other groups who use the library in a more passive or less visible way, such as a place to go if you are homeless or unemployed, this becomes more difficult for libraries to service. This didn't stop some libraries from trying to find a solution.

We tried to, but they were difficult to engage if they didn't have access to the internet. We tried phoning them which worked for some but not others.

The only people we could not easily reach were people sleeping rough.

Some smaller libraries used that to advantage by contacting members and planning individualised access to materials during the closure. This is a situation that is likely unique to smaller libraries, however some of the bigger councils did set up care calls and phone support with library staff. In some cases, phone calls were designed to support people new to, and coping with the online environment. Often these were elderly or older people known already within council or library datasets, so how you reach those that are not members or visible through membership was still a problem.

Library staff worked with other departments of council to set up a phone support service for community members who would normally take part in council programs and services and who may otherwise be socially isolated or have difficulty accessing shopping, medical appointments etc.

A couple of respondents raised the need that many CALD communities have for information and library materials, especially those that may have specific language needs.

CALD communities were contacted about Language Cafe going online and we also added links to the SLNSW's CALD resources to our website

For one library no change in service was experienced as a result of the pandemic.

We serve all people in the community – whoever comes to the door gets assistance – this didn't change at all.

Considerations for future discussion

- Physicists have for decades been openly and proudly working on a 'Theory of Everything' (unsuccessfully) – Why can't librarians have a 'theory of everyone' to help us understand how we can serve all community? (It doesn't mean we will be able to achieve this – just like physicists – but surely there is value in pushing for this).

- When is providing service a risk to our clients and when is it not?

- How could we further develop mitigation strategies and scenarios to prepare ourselves for similar events?

- Have we undervalued our HLS and the possibilities that an outreach model of service offers?

- Do we need to totally rethink the concept of home library and what it means?

- If so, what does that look like?

- Would it be easier to open up HLS to anyone on a seniors card?

Groups served by public libraries during COVID-19 closures

Q19. Please indicate which groups your library served: low income families, unemployed people, CALD communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, homeless people, people living with a disability, people who may be isolated or lonely or other (please specify).

A total of 71 responses were received for this question with be far the most (32%) indicating that the vulnerable groups they served most during the pandemic were people who may be isolated or lonely.

Our library served low income families, unemployed people, people living with disability, but mostly, people who may be isolated or lonely.

This question allowed one response which meant a large number of respondents indicated 'Other' as the choice. In most of these, respondents indicated that they served all of the above groups to some degree through the pandemic. Some others commented that elderly and aged weren't listed, and they saw them as another disadvantaged group that libraries were able to serve during the pandemic.

Considerations for Future Discussion

- How do we know we serve people who are lonely?
- Do we need to revisit our service offerings for marginalised groups?
- Is there some work understanding what needs may now exist that will allow us to provide a service that works when libraries are closed?

Groups excluded due to COVID-19 library closures

Q20. Were any groups excluded due to COVID-19? How will you engage differently with these groups in the future?

Most respondents felt that groups were excluded during the pandemic (54%). Close to a third responded that they didn't feel anyone was excluded, and nearly 14% indicated that they didn't know if any groups were excluded.

The main group identified by respondents (over 50%) were those community members without internet access, or the skills to use digital technology. The library being closed was seen as the main challenge, although some ensured that they kept their free Wi-Fi operating so people could come close to the building to use it.

Respondents were also aware that those on low income, homeless, and unemployed people were regular users of the Wi-Fi and computing services. As such, the impact of not having ICT access hit these disadvantaged cohorts hardest.

Free Wi-Fi was available outside library buildings but we were unable to give access to computers inside.

Groups that were identified by respondents as particularly hard-to-reach included CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as those that were homeless, or at risk of homelessness. One solution identified was that of working more closely with NGOs in the future.

Homeless people and those without internet or computer access were not able to access Wi-Fi or library computers.

In a couple of cases this was exacerbated by the closure of local newspapers, so even traditional information access was lost to these cohorts.

Recognising that at the moment, if the buildings are closed, it is difficult to see how that service could be offered, a number of respondents indicated that they were keen to understand how they can engage with differently with marginalised communities. More than one respondent felt that raising awareness, increasing social media outreach, and developing a drive to promote digital literacy could be a way

forward. Along the same lines, another was planning a series of online videos and tools to help bridge this divide.

A promotional campaign and drive is probably required if not specifically for new members then to raise awareness.

A couple of respondents highlighted the needs of non-members, and how the pandemic attracted users who may not have normally used the local library service. Again, the challenge of how you serve this group when you are closed was highlighted.

Non-members. We didn't expect so many people to be interested in joining – but our online presence promoting library services caught their eye. We would have targeted them specifically and posted out/emailed membership applications for those who couldn't access registration online.

At least one respondent felt that all groups were excluded, while around ten percent of respondents felt that no one was excluded, although the latter did feel that services will look different in the future.

No not excluded but services to our Aged Care Facilities will look different for the foreseeable future as will our Mobile Library service to schools.

It was also noted that even the many regulars that like to spend many hours in the library, or those that use the library as a meeting place, were excluded simply by the library having its doors closed.

The need to spend some time reviewing and understanding how services could be reconfigured or reimagined for these hard-to-reach cohorts was identified by a number of respondents as something that needed attention.

We will review our experiences in the coming months and develop strategies to better respond to these groups should a Pandemic occur again in the future.

Considerations for future discussion

- How can we build our relationships and partner with more NGOs in order to better serve these cohorts?
- What strategies and actions will have the most impact – e.g. increased digital literacy training, more flexible outreach?

Staff skills and capacity

Q21. Did your staff have the skills and capacity to manage during the period of closure? If not, please comment on what you believe was missing.

On the question of whether staff had the skills and capacity to manage during the period of closure, most (89%) of the respondents (n=77), felt that they did have those skills and the capacity required.

Just over ten percent indicated that they saw either a skills gap, or a need for greater capacity. The major skills gap they identified was related to technical or digital skills.

Some staff did not have the technical skills to deliver online programs.

Many respondents commented on the speed with which staff adapted to a new way of working. There was a sense that a large percentage of library staff adapted well to the uncertainty, and that they learnt new skills quickly as a result.

Our staff adapted quickly. It was impressive.

Resilience; confidence when in an 'unknown' scenario.

A lot of skills were honed during the closure including organisational skills, logistical skills and certainly creative skills.

Some respondents were ambivalent. They observed that, although some of their staff struggled with skills, especially digital skills, they did however adapt and manage the crisis generally.

Many also saw the experience as a learning opportunity. This was both in terms of broad new skills, including a better understanding of health and hygiene. For example, at least one library reported that their staff completed the Australian Governments COVID-19 Infection Control course online.

Yes and No. When we didn't know, we learned.

A bit of both. Library staff were stressed and this manifested itself differently for different people.

Some indicated that older staff may have had more of a challenge in moving quickly to new and different ways of operating. This is possibly linked with digital and online programming being the key focus of the change. Some respondents put in place training programs designed to lift this capability quickly.

Yes – we embarked on a massive training program via Yammer and a lot of staff who were afraid of social media and new technology such as Zoom ended up embracing it.

For some of these older staff cohort, it should be noted that they were also in the high-risk category, so it is understandable that such things as, anxiety and concern about their own health and well-being would impact their ability to adapt. One library reported that two staff resigned as the scale of the pandemic became known, and another reported that hiring new staff was a challenge during the pandemic.

Most did well, some struggled working from home – they needed tech skills and time management skills.

Resilience and innovation lacking in much of the long serving staff.

Additionally, for most of the library workforce, working from home would have been an entirely new, unknown and unexpected mode of working.

Some libraries took the opportunity to complete tasks that would be deemed more traditional, and utilised the time to explore with staff what new business models might look like.

We were all still working together within the library to undertake long overdue tasks. This allowed us to openly talk about how we were all individually coping and also expression concerns about our alternate business models.

While it would appear that most respondents saw themselves as having the necessary skills and capacity to manage, some did not share that experience. Some observed that their marketing, communication and technology skills limited their transition to online services and engagement.

They reported that a lack of will to look at doing things differently, combined with a difficulty in changing behaviours, and an unwillingness to explore how to do things differently, made it difficult to achieve rapid change.

Fear closed minds to new opportunities to connect with our community and emerge from the crisis with stronger relationships. Instead, after three months of being closed people have found other avenues to access the services /information.

### Considerations for future discussion

- How can we make sure what our staff skills learnt through COVID can be built up post pandemic?
- What skills and talents do our staff have that we do not know about and how do we capture that for future use?

Staff reactions

Q22. In general, how did your staff feel about working while the library was closed to the public?

Respondents were given a range of options and the ability to choose more than one response. A total of 291 responses were given by a total of 79 respondents and it wasn't unusual for respondents to have both a negative and a positive response. There was almost a sense of loss around having to close and not work with their communities directly.

They missed the regular contact with our visitors.
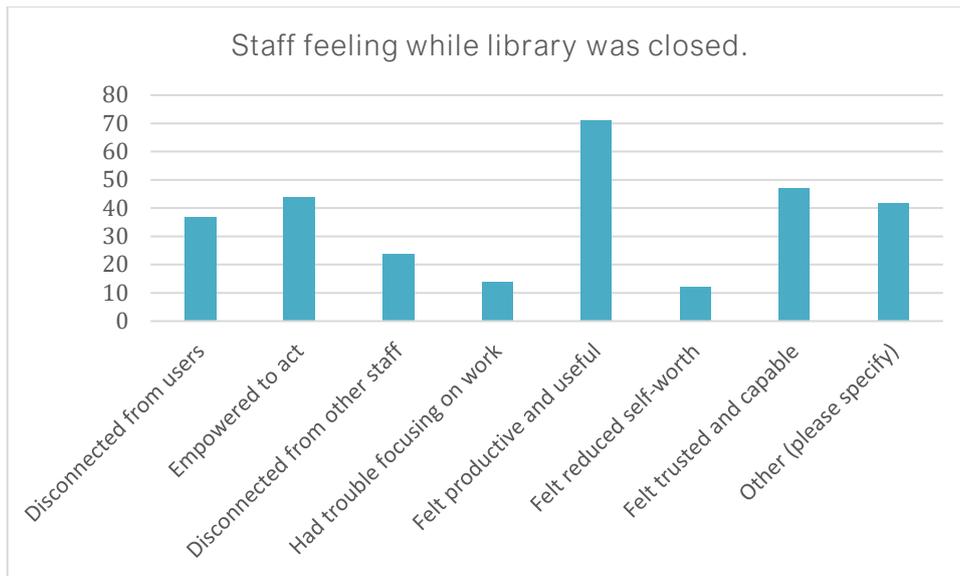
A mixture of all the above really

Overwhelming staff felt productive and useful (24%). This didn't preclude them from feeling disconnected from other staff, or from users. Staff would likely have experienced all of the options at some point during the pandemic.

> *Feeling overwhelmed, uncertainty about the how, what and when things might change, inspired to be more innovative and creative with online programming.*

A number of respondents felt that the key driver for the sense of loss, or disconnectedness of their staff came about due to the loss of interaction with library users and the community. For libraries that implemented click and collect or continued with HLS there was a feeling that this at least kept some connection to library users.

> *Library2u and the continuation of home library service allowed staff to stay engaged with customers and the community even while the physical buildings were closed.*

> *While there was a feeling of disconnection generally, staff knew they were providing a valued and worthwhile service to their community.*

Those that could feel some sort of connection to library users indicated that the positive comments and feedback gave them a sense of reassurance that they were valued for their work by the people that really count – the users.

> *Felt a strong sense of reassurance about the value of the library to the community due to high number of positive comments and interactions generated by our click and collect service.*

Some library managers recognised that keeping the staff busy during closure, even with tasks such as stocktakes and weeding, gave them a sense of feeling useful and valued. Often these were satisfying tasks as they had 'sat on the backburner' for some time, and getting them done gave staff a sense of

pride, teamwork, and satisfaction. This was a deliberate strategy by some managers to keep staff busy and not focussed on the negatives of the pandemic.

Stocktake and other projects arranged very quickly so staff were given goals. Teamwork esp. for branch staff important. Everyone was focused.

Staff embraced the opportunity to carry out tasks such as stock take and weeding.

As well as keeping staff busy, library management also recognised the need to open up more communication avenues with staff. This was done to give them a voice to share how they were feeling, as well as feed into the necessary tasks at hand.

The twice weekly staff meetings mostly demonstrated a mood of engagement and connectedness and purpose. Sometimes the mood was down and fearful, uncertain. In the most part I would say that most team members felt trusted and capable.

A large proportion of staff were very committed to service development and delivery. These staff, some respondents felt, were empowered to act, trusted and capable, productive and useful. They were seen as focused, supportive of library priorities and each other. Another proportion of staff were extremely anxious, and had difficulty managing their response to the changes imposed by pandemic conditions.

Like most workplaces, we had a range that went from people who coped well to those who were unhappy having their work-life balance upended. One staff member had some mental health issues emerge because of being alone for so long. Some staff had children to care for and were busy with home lessons. Some staff were able to work from home part time and others could work onsite. Everyone seemed happier once they were back at work and seeing their colleagues.

Just as it wasn't the same for all staff, it wasn't the same all the time. This 'emotional yo-yo' effect will likely continue for some time as the pandemic stretches into 2021. The ability for library managers to have the skills, awareness, and even the energy to keep on top of this issue will be challenging and need support.

Scared at first but became confident with services and change.

Respondents also indicated that the uncertainty, created by the pandemic, had an effect were staff also felt anxious, scared and confused. This hasn't gone away and will likely continue through 2021. One respondent highlighted that exhaustion will likely manifest within, and across staff for some time to come.

Scared and confused.

Some felt anxious and/or lost a sense of purpose in their role.

One of the causes identified by respondents relating to feeling of disconnection and isolation among staff was the fact that many staff were working from home. This is not a common way for library staff to work. Apart from the fact that home offices had to be set up, a challenge in itself, many had never had the experience of working remotely, which requires a definite skill-set and understanding. On top of that, the lack of interaction with customers exacerbated the feelings of isolation.

As all staff were able to work from home most staff felt pretty good but some did struggle with the isolation and not interacting with customers.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic has some time to run, it will be important to understand how the staff are coping at selected time intervals over the next year or two. As highlighted, many libraries managed to keep focused through the early stages, but what happens over time? The health and welfare of staff was a key concern that many managers spoke about in this survey.

It would be worth also posing this question across the whole staff of NSW public libraries as a check to see if all of the workforce had a similar experience, or if there were areas of significant difference that can provide learning and give managers direction and options for supporting their workforce.[7]

It is hard to generalise as staff reacted differently. I had a fair bit of scope to accommodate the varying reactions to the situation (special leave, excess leave, splinter award, redeployment, LTYD, HLS etc.). Staff who worked onsite found it to be a bonding exercise.

Considerations for future discussion

- How would this look from a staff perspective – would it be significantly different?

- If the pandemic last longer (likely), and there are further lockdowns, do we have the skills, ability and support across our managers to ensure they can meet these challenges?

- On the whole staff have risen to the challenge – how do we celebrate this and reward them?

- And how do we bring those that struggled along in a supportive way?

---

[7] Campbelltown have done a staff survey of feelings that may be worth replicating or sampling across other libraries as an additional data point.

LOOKING FORWARD

What does the 'new normal' look like?
Library service planning and delivery beyond 1 June 2020

Looking to the future

Q23. What will likely change in the future? Do you envisage changes to such things as building design and size, investment in digital resources, programming and events, finance and budget structures etc?

Respondents (n=73) envisaged that a number of aspects of library operations would likely change in the future. From the experience of COVID-19, most envisaged a move towards more digital offerings, as well as larger and more flexible library spaces.

More isolation equates to more need for social/human connection. Physical spaces and their application become more important.

The importance of the library, digital and physical, as a place of social connection was highlighted. The balance between the library in its more traditional guise as a place of social gathering, and how it will now need to operate as an expanded virtual entity provides a framework for much of this discussion.

Area of library operation	Anticipated Changes for Public Libraries
Digital	• Maintain the online presence with storytimes, video crafts, promotions etc. it reached groups which normally don't visit the library • Inclusion of more online programming/events & continuation of online programming even when in-library programming re-commences • We know we can reach a broader audience by video streaming or having some components of a service or program online • Live steaming of major events • More investment in digital resources for interactive book clubs • More webinars may occur • No. of public PCs reviewed in light of ongoing public health considerations • Investing more into our digital resources in the form of training, especially for our older patrons • Portable Wi-Fi hot spots for disadvantaged people • More contactless service delivery options – i.e. self-check and mobile printing • Own social media presence to enable us to have more direct interaction (for libraries that relied on Council media)
Physical	• Future redevelopments of the library to increase space and size • Anticipate continuing with social distancing requirements • Social distancing floor decals • A reduction of seating in the medium term • We will be rejigging our computer section to create more space for users • We will continue to focus on larger libraries in hubs, don't think we'll return to smaller libraries • Protective screens and sneeze guards at service points • Increase in measures to stop the transmission of disease & hand sanitisation station likely to stay • Reviewing all face to face programs particularly in the smaller sites

Area of library operation	Anticipated Changes for Public Libraries
	• Meeting room capacity likely to restrict programming • Buildings in the future will encompass movable areas as flexible spaces • Emergence of 'occupancy counters' at entrances to libraries • Information and circulation desk to be redesigned (e.g. circular desk can be approached from all angles exacerbating social distancing protocols) • Toilet and changeroom design (e.g. contactless soap/taps entry/exit) • Numbers at activities will need to be controlled and may have to become bookable sessions
Collection Access & Management	• Continued Click and Collect and more home & workplace deliveries • Devices that people can borrow to access eResources • Increase purchase and investment in eResources and digital resources • Cosmetic changes including shelving to accommodate self-serve reservations • Change opening hours • Removal of reservation fees and fines • More 24/7 book vending machines and self-check • Review of some physical collections such as newspapers and magazines due to the high risk of infection if the virus is prevalent in the community • A trend with spaces and declining physical collections • Retractable crowd control systems to direct foot traffic and enforce social distancing
Information Service	• Provide assistance through technology and programs for unemployed (anticipating increase in unemployment) • Change in customer service – more training to work with screens – more visual cues from staff • Creation of more digital content related to information services supporting programs and outreach • A need for more outreach programs and Wi-Fi spots in community centres to access library services • Teaching Tech Classes to CALD communities to help them better adapt to accessing online services • Roving customer service and concierge will have to change (staff may be less eager to undertake concierge style services)
Partnerships & relationships	• Need to work on/rethink partnerships • Partnerships leading to the sharing of library/community and commercial spaces • More consortia membership to share money about and get better outcomes
Marketing and Promotion	• Promotion of online services • One big thing will be getting people coming back to the library • Increased social media use – exploring the use of additional platforms • Communications and marketing - development of a clear, consistent, and professional communication plan complete with templates and checklists
Staff HR and Library Planning (including financial)	• Budget considerations • Budget for next year has been considerably reduced due to overall council losses • More budget on digital content and a review of program delivery • More spent on cleaning and sanitising than ever before • Reassessment of library strategy • Re-evaluation of position descriptions • Reshape roles so that there is less focus on the transactional tasks • Expansion and investment in more technically skilled staff, ongoing expansion of library's digital capabilities and offerings • Allow staff to work from home when not rostered to desk • More WFH providing a better life/work balance for staff with greater productivity returns • New flexible hours policy • Significant changes to staffing and rostering

Area of library operation	Anticipated Changes for Public Libraries
	• Financially libraries will need to keep lobbying for further resources • More online staff meetings and virtual workshops • Moving to a cashless service • Increased investment in development of skills to deliver digital services and create online content • Engage consultants to conduct an entire library service review

Some respondents felt that much of how libraries were operating pre-pandemic would return to how they were, and that very little, if anything, would change. To some degree, they felt that the length of time that the restrictions continue will have an impact as to what is likely to change, but that there will be a gradual return to what was before.

A gradual return to programming and events as restrictions are reduced.

Others were uncertain as to what the future holds. They hinted that they were open to exploring how libraries might change as a result of COVID-19 but it was too early to form a view. Given many libraries are still in the middle of their immediate response to the pandemic, adopting a 'wait and see' approach would appear to be a logical position to take for a while. How long the restrictions continue for some was seen as a critical factor when thinking about what future change may be in store for them.

Not sure at present as we're still working through whether these changes will be permanent or not - I think it's too early to tell for sure.

Some highlighted that they saw that changes for libraries will be linked to changes in community. They observed that how particular cohorts are impacted by the pandemic will likely change the way they use the library and as such, a downturn in the economy will bring change to the library and how it works with some individuals and groups. Some mentioned higher unemployment, but also that new cohorts such as, home-schooled families will have emerging needs that will likely manifest in a need for public library support.

Higher youth unemployment and unemployment in general will require library services to find ways to serve them. Services need to be ready to go virtual quickly.

Some felt that given the economic forecast, that the library could become more of a community hub, so more of a space for people to study, seek work and engage with others. This was seen as important development and was seen as aligned with an expansion in digital events. They also envisaged that this included the resources required to work more strongly in this digital space.

We are in the process of designing a new space and it will have to take account of the potential need to provide service in a pandemic- space to socially distance in everyday use and at programs.

As a part of this, the question of what size a library should be is emerging as an issue. One that will likely require sharper focus for NSW public libraries in the light of COVID-19. Some libraries that had recently undertaken building developments felt that their new larger and flexible spaces will prove an advantage. While others were clear that the experience of COVID-19 has encouraged them to take action in the short term, but to also look to future library redevelopments that increase space and size.

Our new buildings have already been planned as flexible spaces that provide future-proofing to changing community needs and service requirement.

It was highlighted by some that, as a result of the closure, that there were high levels of engagement online. This provided the ability to reach a wider audience online and that they would likely continue the drive to shift online into the future. This included bringing in new audiences and users.

It is considered that online programming will supplement and enhance in-library programming and provide an added dimension that hadn't been considered pre-COVID.

In terms of some likely changes in managing staff and teams, the use of virtual meetings over tools such as Zoom was seen as beneficial and likely to increase in the future. Many felt that it worked well during lockdown, and had an added benefit of cutting down on a lot of travel and the associated costs. A couple of country libraries highlighted that they saw a broader value in the use of Zoom as being very helpful in connecting with suppliers and other libraries (as well as the aforementioned saving of travel time, etc.).

Working from home was also seen as something likely to increase. One library not only saw the operational value, but felt it provided a better life/work balance for staff and they were able to maintain productivity.

One respondent did feel however that the online experience wasn't that successful, primarily due to the older cohort that use the library not being able to use the online or not having devices.

Digital resources weren't that successful because many of our clients are older and don't have devices – they preferred to read 'real books'!

Another had a rather bleak view of the future – quite understandable given how the pandemic has impacted across the globe. The relationship between the strong foot traffic and membership that libraries enjoy, and what happens to budgets if these decline as a result was highlighted.

If the social distancing and quarantining continue, the future is bleak. I don't think we can continue by concentrating on on-line resources. If the library cannot be a community social space then we will see reduced numbers leading to reduced budgets.

Others had a more optimistic view of what is likely to change. Acknowledging that we need to 'think differently', they saw a key opportunity in focusing on the human and social value of libraries, and ensuring we continue to build community engagement or 'social expansion'.

I do think we need to 'think differently'. I anticipate more funds to be invested in digital resources but also, I believe we need to offer more to different groups – 'social expansion' if you like. People need people and we are well positioned to extend our programming and events.

This digital push, that libraries were in many ways forced to adopt, brings into focus the need to reconsider the library in a more holistic way. The bringing together of the physical and the online as a complete service model, rather than digital or HLS being add on services. This rethinking of 'what a library is', will allow libraries to explore completely different models of library service.

With this balance in mind, some respondents did feel however, that programs and services that moved online may not stay online. They did observe though, that online will be a much more important consideration in library planning and service delivery.

We have learnt that this might be a way of extending the services and programs we run within the library. If gatherings remain at reduced numbers. Digital resources will definitely be a focus as many members moved online. Finance and budget structures will need to be monitored carefully with the broader financial outlook being fairly gloomy.

Considerations for future discussion

- What is a library space anymore? And what is a book?
- How do we ensure we deliver a balanced library?
- Can we envisage a future that reverses this move to the online?
- How do we shape to meet both models?
- Who gets left out with these likely changes, and what do we do about that?

Rethinking library services

Q24. What will you have to do differently, and what would you like to do differently?

Based on the comments of respondents (n=71), and the long lists of what it is libraries will have to do differently, combined with the 'wishlist' of what they would like to do differently, it is clear that much work has to be done in rethinking public library services in New South Wales. The balance between online and in-library, and how that will evolve was again highlighted as a major question confronting libraries.

It is an opportune time to reflect on what we do and how we can offer services with options – some inhouse and some online – there will certainly be a public need for both offerings.

Have to do Differently	Like to do Differently
Need for social distancing (spacing activities and desks/computers)	Would like to be more innovative and braver in the use of online platforms
Increased cleaning - so cleaning keyboards and mouse/ desktops and even pens after each use	Expand online delivery of programs alongside delivery onsite
(re) Arrangement of the library	Staff resource dedicated to online and outreach programming
Events run via COVID-19 regulations (e.g. monitoring numbers)	Develop cross departmental teamwork that enhances our connection to the community
Meeting rooms and PCs run via COVID-19 regulations	Have more interaction with other sections of Council
More emphasis on eCollections	Invest in digitising local studies for curated online access
More considered in our approach to programming	Deliver some more programs so socially connect the community

Have to do Differently	Like to do Differently
Events to be more inclusive of those that can't visit our physical libraries	More digital literacy, more community driven programs
Have our community ready for online (digital literacy skills)	Greater digital education for customers
Boost our eCommunications – social media	Establish outreach service - delivery of library materials with community partners
Provide online programming to continue the popularity of this delivery method	Introduce more relevant programs
Provide professional development & new challenges to staff	Ensure accessibility of library services to all community members.
Continue to value leadership & change management training	Staff would like to work from home for a part of their jobs
Change and review opening hours	Be able to work from home one day a week
Allow and manage staff to work from home	Continue to develop engaging/fun social media video content
Work on a disaster plan & create checklist to be more prepared	Take a community on a technology journey
Increased hours for all staff in customer facing tasks	Invest in online chat reference services
Create better public consultation	Shake the library up – remove some programs
Risk assessments around stock handling	Service our elderly and vulnerable better
Take the rosters to a centralised whole of service level moving from the 'branch-centric' roster	Find new ways to engage with people with low / no digital literacy (education is only a small part of this)
Review and/or stand down casual staff	Continue to offer a 'greeter' service like being offered at the moment
Quarantining of items	Improve our systems to be more agile, revise our programs and review online resources
Introduce a membership campaign to get people back to the library	Join more consortia to share budget and obtain increased benefit
Incorporate Library at Home and the existing website into one comprehensive website	Engage in different ways
Build more scenario planning into our strategic direction	Adjust expenditure
Provide a delivery service other than HLS	Increase staff numbers
Work with reduced staffing	Continue with online programming and explore new models of service delivery
Rebuilding of the team morale	Change many of the processes and services
Continue to build resilience in the staff and nurture the ability to adapt quickly	Develop a cooperative statewide program for online storytimes
Update library policies e.g. code of conduct	More opportunities for facilitated online book discussions/author events
Run programs on days we aren't open to the public	Build more scenario planning into our strategic direction
Run bookings for activities	
Staff no longer able to work weekends as overtime	

Respondents were very community service focused in both the list of what they will have to do, and the things that they would like to do. While foremost were concerns around health and safety of staff and community, there was a strong recognition of the valuable role libraries play in creating social and digital inclusion.

Must make sure that people aren't left behind as we move to a more digital world.

Whether it be the list of 'have to do's', or the 'would like to do's', the respondents identified a need for further work around what has been learnt through this experience, and the need to move to a more online environment, whilst at the same time ensuring that the workforce are given the professional development opportunities to allow this to happen.

Continue with the technology-based programmes and enhance it more so for the future.

Digital literacy and inclusion are a necessity with staff capabilities and confidence enhanced – the library will be the place to go for digital training tips and production.

There were a few respondents that felt that they will not do anything much differently, or that not too much will change as a result of the pandemic. An interesting view, given the magnitude of the impact that COVID-19 is having worldwide. On the whole there was a desire to learn from the experience – and sooner rather than later.

We will need to learn from this experience sooner rather later.

We are currently running an online survey on our online services that will give us some indication to the future.

Some felt that there was a need to build more scenario planning into strategic direction for all NSW Public Libraries. They felt that this which will allow libraries to be nimbler in the future.

We don't know what's coming or from where, but the challenge will be to be able to think laterally.

One respondent posed a question around what role the State Library may play in helping develop some of the actions that they would like to do differently in the future. This could also include support for some of those things that they will have to do as well.

Overall respondents wanted to be back in control of providing services to their users and engaging with their communities in as many ways as possible, including positive online interactions and programming.

We would like to welcome our community back with open arms and an unreserved commitment to customer service! More realistically, we would like to re-engage with our community through positive online interaction, programming, and readers' advisory.

Considerations for future discussion

- How do we make sure that the 'have to do' and the 'wish to do' can be done?
- What is our strategy to achieve the Wishlist – and why are we doing it?

Continuation of services developed during COVID-19 library closures

Q25. What services, programs and work practices that were established during the COVID-19 shutdown will continue after reopening?

A total of 73 respondents indicated that a number of services established during the COVID-19 shutdown will continue to be offered after reopening. Some were very specific to their communities and others were more broadly implemented such as the click and collect services.

Area of library operation	Work practices established during the COVID-19 shutdown likely to continue
Digital	• Online programming (authors talks) • Library App – the library at your fingertips • Online children's services (e.g. storytimes) • Our online writers' group • Online seminars using professional presenters • Increased expenditure on digital collections (e.g. subscription to online newspapers) Borrow Box audio and ebooks, Kanopy and other online services • Online memberships • Live chat • Code Club online and this could be something to keep for children that have problem getting to the library due to distance or ability • Phone 121 Tech Help and continue online tech assistance for seniors • Online writer's blog, reader's news blog, create and explore blog for kids • Lego club • Brain training kits at home and participate in a group setting
Physical	• Maintain social spacing, screen and hygiene practice (e.g. PPE) • Queue management • New library building design and the reduction in the number of public libraries • Run some programs on the lawn outside the library so a maximum number of people can participate
Collection Access & Management	• eRresources consortia membership • Removal of overdues and loan limits (removal of barriers that have traditionally defined libraries) • Home deliveries and contactless loan pick-ups • Seed library (seeds can be selected online and provided as part of Click and Collect service • Click and Collect & Browse and Borrow • Self-serve reservations • Quarantining returned stock • Home library services increased considerably or expanded • Encouraging customers to use self-serve kiosks • Use suppliers' online services to place orders for collection materials rather than select from site visits by suppliers.
Information Service	• Continue with a higher level of library created online content • Concierge practice • Borrower engagement project – staff contacted library members personally to update contact details and to advise of all online resources and other council services available • The improved 'Library Enquiries' process which was set up to respond to customer enquiries via the website will continue • Business support videos

Area of library operation	Work practices established during the COVID-19 shutdown likely to continue
	• Asking people to create and submit online content e.g. COVID stories and photos • Children's craft packages for pre-schoolers • Holiday craft packages • PC Booking and print management system to allow staff to monitor and better manage usage
Partnerships & relationships	• Seeking partnership opportunities to connect with particular groups e.g. youth
Marketing and Promotion	• Promotion of online services • More social media outreach • Filming and posting tutorials for digital services via our SM • Online videos and promotions (e.g. How-to tutorials) • The weekly quiz on our Facebook
Staff HR and Library Planning (including Financial)	• Possible change in hours to enable more staff meetings and daily preparation • Flexible working arrangements for staff (WFH) • No contact payments (cashless) • Virtual team meetings (Zoom etc.) • More involvement of staff across teams – working groups on readers advisory, virtual displays, handling customer enquiries, eCollections collection development

Considerations for future discussion

• What are the priorities and what can we do collectively to support economies of scale?

• What are the things we will stop doing?

New audiences/users

Q26. How do you envisage keeping and serving any new audiences/users that emerged during COVID-19?

Respondents (N=70) had a list of activities that that they felt would help them keep and build new audiences post COVID-19. The key aspect of this centred around ensuring more online capability and associated resources were made available. As well that the associated publicity and promotion was attended to so as to ensure broad community awareness and driver use.

We will work to keep online programming audiences by developing an online presence that supports and complements physical in-library programming.

We will continue to maintain a stronger social media presence due to successful engagement during COVID times.

Keeping and serving any new audiences/users that emerged during COVID-19
Bring the new online members of our LEGO Club into the Library when LEGO resumes
Continue to purchase eResources, produce online videos
Continue click and collect and Home Delivery to anyone who needs/wants it
Increased and more innovative online presence
Possibly offer an eResource – only card for visitors to the LGA
Investigate the possibility of an ongoing Library2U delivery service
Heavily promote and build on these collections (Online) to maintain and attract new users
We will continue to monitor eResource usage and may need to direct additional funding to eBooks and eAudio if usage continues at a higher level than pre-pandemic.
Strong Social media presence & continue with our Facebook promotions
Promote through enewsletters
Streaming live activities like our craft groups, book clubs
Expanding online presence with programs and resources
Maintain and expand print and collect, JP online and seed library
Remain agile and respond to customer feedback – check in to see how the community think we are performing.
Library App – our app has attracted new users and we hope it will continue to keep them engaged with our services
Continuing to offer weekly home & workplace deliveries
Maintain and enhance regular ongoing communication with members via email and phone
Maybe taking bookings for programs and spaces
Increase investment in and access to digital collections and programs
Providing ad hoc setup assistance to people loading the elibrary apps on their devices – so they know support is available if technology isn't cooperating with them
Maintain the 'New to the library' posts on social media displaying titles that are fresh and new
Keep the dialogue going with the whole team (not just the programs team) about the need to create, curate
Keep our online presence buzzing with collections and online program delivery
More publicity in print and radio media
Shorelink will continue to expand the Shorelink Digital Library
New HLS clients will be incorporated into normal HLS runs
Deepening our community partnerships with Aboriginal, rural, senior, youth, disability and multicultural groups remain a top priority
iPads for loan with remote training
Spending more on online services, technology training and advertising

Some respondents indicated that they weren't sure that they had new audiences. This could have been influenced by the fact that they didn't see, or notice any new audiences or users using the library services during the pandemic.

No new audiences or users.

Others recognised the importance of finding ways for those that joined and used the library more during the pandemic to take advantage of it post COVID-19. Although those that had witnessed an uptake online, both in use of eResources and programming activities, were happy to ensure that they kept doing that well with an increased capability as a means of keeping these users.

Encourage digital only members to physically visit the library and find out about the full range of services and facilities the library provides.

Online programming has attracted a different audience which we would like to maintain – we are working on this.

Respondents noted that those new to the library might not be aware of the full service that is on offer. They saw that not only keeping the online experience high quality but ensuring fresh resources ae regularly added and that promoting the broader gamut of what the library is, and can do, would be an important strategy to keep new users onboard.

Many new patrons joined online. It is likely that what the library offers is not fully known to them. Promotion will be key to keep them engaged.

Some of this included maintaining regular contact and showcasing new service/resources as they come online. Also, the need to ensure that the library was engaging and understanding the needs of these clients was highlighted by asking for feedback – e.g. online surveys. This would allow the library to be receptive to their needs, which may be non-traditional to libraries, and thus create opportunities.

New users have been recruited to e-services. It will be essential to keep the supply of new eResources flowing to meet expectations and demand. High unemployment typically leads to greater use of Library services and it is likely this will occur in the coming months.

Although most did highlight the need for using marketing through various social and traditional mediums to ensure the message was shared to those new to the library. One respondent did highlight that they felt there was need to understand the issue of new users better. That is, that the number of those that joined during the pandemic may have been less than what would usually have joined had the doors been open. So it may equate to a net loss.

This requires further investigation. While we had a good number of new memberships it was only half as many as we would have gained if we had been open. I think it's too easy to think people came on board because of what we were offering during closure – it could be they were just bored or read an article!

Considerations for future discussion

- How do we make sure we don't leave our old audiences behind?

- Will new users bring new pressures to our service or are they an opportunity for us?

- How can we better measure the use of online?

Emerging opportunities

Q27. What opportunities can you see emerging from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic? This could include collective behaviours around change, shared delivery of projects of services, online service provision, unified policy positions etc.

A total of 71 respondents identified a broad range of opportunities they thought could emerge for NSW public libraries as a result of the experience of the pandemic. Many observed that online services came into their own, and that the disruption to normal services invigorated some staff to learn new skills, work in a different area, and think about things differently. Despite the fact that some staff struggled with COVID-19, in one sense COVID-19 has provided a significant learning experience for NSW public Libraries.

COVID has been the ultimate CHANGE Management Live Workshop!

In general, respondents noted that overall people were more collaborative. That staff had a sense of being in this together, and that the big opportunity could be to build on these feelings of working toward a shared goal with increased confidence and resilience.

A focused and unified approach that gives a high level of confidence in the ability of the staff to be creative and nimble in response to a crisis.

Strategic Domain	Opportunities
Community Engagement	- Better online services & more use of online services - Increase online participation and engagement - Increased focus on flexible programming of activities that can be delivered onsite and online (e.g. Lego challenge, craft activities, engagement with authors and reading) - Thinking of the library website and OPAC as a library branch - Expanding the library's role in supporting a 'creative community' – e.g. writers festivals, music events, travelling art exhibitions etc. - Explore opportunities to partner with other social welfare agencies to deliver services to isolated and vulnerable clients - Become even more customer-focused - Look for new home delivery possibilities including partnerships to deliver library materials to vulnerable people - Develop more individualised services - Develop smaller more targeted activities and programs - Develop more shared services and program initiatives with neighbouring councils - Improve links with CALD community - Enable co-working hub concepts and small business development activities - Explore more opportunities for greater outreach opportunities
Professional Development	- More IT PD – come up to speed with technology and beyond - Rethink PD – We now know we need staff with more training and we need to make it easy for the library member - Provide more flexibility and skills for staff to work from home - Encourage and seed greater creative thinking – PD and recruitment
Resourcing	- Transition staff towards higher value work – from a transactional focus on issuing and discharging loans to new ways of connecting with the community through alternative models of service delivery (such as street libraries, seed library) - Maintain Online meetings for staff communication and team meetings - Working and providing the services in different ways - Increased flexible working arrangements for staff

Strategic Domain	Opportunities
	• Flatter hierarchy; lot more cross team collaboration • many opportunities to change our work practices • Providing PC work stations/platforms that allow staff to easily pick up and relocated to Work from Home
Branding & Identity	• Rethink how library services are packaged and presented overall • The importance of the library to the community – Library profile was raised in the community • Greater awareness of the role of libraries in Council – we were the good news story for council and received a lot of positive feedback and press • Improve the way we promote future events and services
Leadership & Influence	• Work more with other departments of Council, sharing ideas and knowledge • More collaborative projects with other libraries • Online programming that is innovative and risky • Ensure NSW Public Libraries have debrief opportunities and SWOT analysis • Community readiness to such a change – build on need to be adaptive & being prepared • Shared sense of readiness and delivery of projects/services across library/Council depts. and partnership groups • Model and test collective behaviours around change and sharing of collective information
Governance & Regulation	• Having a business continuity plan for all • Standardised contingency plan template for libraries in respond to pandemics • Changing some outdated administrative rules • Improved cleaning and hygiene in the library buildings and materials • Develop unified policy positions
Resources	• Increase the library's capacity and role as a 'memory place' (i.e. custodian/curator of local history, identity and stories) • Invest in more library owned content creation – performances, local history, podcasts etc. • Improved access to collections (such as curation of digital resources) • New emphasis on reader's advisory services through Click and Collect/Phone & Collect • Improve staff awareness of our customer's tastes and preferences • Have the reader's advisory conversation (by phone) more often • New opportunities for shared projects • Expand number of 24/7 book vending machines • Develop state wide fines free service with automatic renewals • Allow more patrons will continue to reserve items for ease • More online programming offerings from Publishers for greater access

Some respondents felt that, off the back of the demonstrated high levels of agility shown by libraries, that opportunities would come. Especially for those that had worked closely with their council counterparts.

The library service and its staff demonstrated high levels of agility to respond to the challenges of the pandemic and quickly became a demonstrable model of Council's 'Same Services, Delivered Differently' tagline.

Along similar lines, others saw an opportunity coming from the experience to explore what libraries do, and to look objectively at programs and activities to see what could be improved. In particular, it was observed that those staff that felt empowered to act and who displayed resilience through the pandemic would likely be the ones in the best position to drive this approach in the future. Hence the staff are the opportunity.

I'm hearing much less of 'but we can't do that', online service provision, great chance to look objectively about programs and activities and see if there is a better means of delivery.

We need to capture and capitalise on that can-do attitude!

Some respondents went further, identifying an opportunity to review and question all aspects of what libraries do. This ranged from some very fundamental things such as, the opportunity to change some outdated administrative rules, through to bigger picture thinking around the overall service model of libraries themselves including understanding how to reposition libraries into a more hybrid model of online and in person.

Do we need to continue doing everything we did, or are there better and more relevant models we can implement?

Several respondents commented on the possibility for greater sharing of resources. One highlighted that they observed during the pandemic that there was duplication of effort across libraries. This is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, however it did shine a light on the potential for more organised resource sharing, and even consortia development in the future.

Everyone was filming storytimes, devising ways to run click and collect services. Whilst as a profession we are extremely good at sharing information perhaps in a time like a pandemic sharing actual resources could have a place?

I see great opportunities for consortia – whether within Zones or statewide; also, opportunities for collaborative projects e.g. One Book One Community, author visits etc.

Considerations for future discussion

- How far can we take the concept of resources sharing?
- What are the pros and cons and when it comes to the crunch what can you bring to the table?
- What will you give up for more collaboration to occur?
- How will you manage the politics and governance that come with more collaborative ventures?

Financial impact of COVID-19 on public libraries

Q28. What change to your operating budget for the upcoming financial year 2020/2021 are you anticipating, if any?

Interestingly, when asked whether what they thought would happen to operating budgets as a result of COVID-19, most (50%) felt that there would either be an increase (9%), or that there would be no change (41%). This was despite the fact that in previous questions many respondents commented that they felt that there would be an economic downturn that will impact local government budgets.

As well, a number did comment that they thought the outlook wasn't promising. They felt that, although budgets may have been set before the advent of COVID-19, it is likely there will be pressure to reduce expenditure, freeze, or delay expenditure.

This will depend on the economic outlook and council's financial position in the short to medium term.

The 2020-21 budget will be vote on at the end of July. At this stage we are still looking at some increased funding to open on Sundays for a few hours. However, this was in the budget docs before COVID struck, and it may not survive the cut given the negative impact of COVID overall to Council's bottom line.

Some did highlight that their budgets for the next period had been set just prior to the pandemic, so possibly it is this that has given some degree of certainty.

Our budget was finalised prior to March 2020 and I don't anticipate any changes - we were looking at about a 3% increase.

The question of what might happen with infrastructure budgets could well be worth exploring further as an opportunity for libraries. Given that it is likely that all levels of government will be looking for an infrastructure spend to stimulate economic activity, it may well be an area that could be a positive for some libraries in terms of new builds and refreshing of assets. Some did indicate that some building projects had been put on hold for the short term.

Operating budget approved, capital budget reduced and one major project deferred.

Our Council has chosen to defer capital expenditure with several library repair/refurbishment projects pushed back over a number of future financial years.

Considerations for future discussion

- How do we plan for a downturn and prepare as a statewide network?

- What positioning should we take on funding impacts - and when should we take it (an early position has a risk of more unknowns and possible mistakes and a later positioning may mean others get early access to limited funds?

- How do we help each other over the next five years? Do we develop a completely new model for supplementing our bottom line?

- What if the impact is minus 20% plus – what happens then?

- How do we measure our impact now? Has the foot-traffic metric 'passed us by'?

Further information

Q29. Please add any further information that informs the response to COVID-19 from your library. This could include links to online material about the service delivered during this period, photos, newspaper articles, social media posts etc.

A total of 38 libraries responded with data for this question. Quite a few gave links to their website, Instagram or Facebook pages. Further work should be considered in ensuring that the experience of the pandemic is documented fully from both a historical perspective and a planning for the future point of view. The role of the library as a documenter and recorder of social history was highlighted.

We did take photos of COVID-19 related items in the community for examples lines for fish shop prior to Good Friday. Pubs doing home delivery of food.

Examples of media about NSW Public Libraries

- https://www.sunraysiadaily.com.au/arts-entertainment/1150121/library-services-deliver-for-wentworth-shire-in-lockdown
- https://www.irrigator.com.au/story/6778212/leeton-library-lockdown-over-as-doors-re-open/
- https://www.irrigator.com.au/story/6747327/leeton-library-pivots-services-during-covid-19-shutdown/
- https://email.synergymail.com.au/t/ViewEmail/r/089A42A823C1CD5C2540EF23F30FEDED
- https://www.irrigator.com.au/story/6687037/leeton-library-cancels-group-style-events/
- https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=237977160808785

Considerations for future discussion

- How valuable will be the resources (videos, photos etc) that libraries have generated be for future generations?
- Could we invest more in capturing our social and local history and how do we convert this to creative content for our communities?
- How can we better tell our story – is this a potential for greater collaboration?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

641 DI

641 DI is an Australian consultancy working with the public libraries, the NFP sector and government agencies. Its aim is to build capacity through better understanding of how services and programs intersect purposefully with communities to reduce social isolation and increase social inclusion. Services include project evaluation, research and planning services including scenario planning. Brendan Fitzgerald as Director has extensive experience at Senior and executive levels in libraries and community agencies, including over 10 years at the State Library of Victoria and Infoxchange. Brendan works regularly with UK based scenario planning expert Dr Matt Finch. Recent clients include LIANZA, Libraries Tasmania. City of Newcastle, Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR), Hitnet and Grow Hope Foundation.

Contact Details:

Brendan Fitzgerald
Director 641 DI
Consultancy and Research Services
brendan@641DI.com
0417 397 844

Strategic Network Committee

The role of the committee is to advise on State Library and public library collaborative activities, monitor emerging trends and support research projects to develop and review the NSW public library network.

Members

Debbie Best, Manager, Sutherland Shire Libraries

Keryl Collard, Manager, Maitland City Library

Vicki Edmunds, Manager, Blue Mountains City Library

Melanie Gurney, Manager, Northern Beaches Library Service

Megan Jordan-Jones, Manager Bega Valley Shire Library

Michelle Maunder, Manager, Mid-Western Library

Chris Jones, Manager, MidCoast Library Service

Jo Carmody, Regional Manager, Richmond Tweed Regional Library

Robert Knight, Director, Riverina Regional Library

Cameron Morley, Manager, Public Library Services, State Library of NSW