

COVID-19 Emergency Response – Update

Date:	June 22, 2020
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report to update the Toronto Public Library Board on Toronto Public Library’s (TPL’s) implementation of the reopening plans as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency, and to provide information on staffing.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year’s budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on April 27, 2020, the Library Board received a report on TPL’s operations, services and responses to the COVID-19 public health emergency, its integration with City of Toronto’s Incident Management System, and details of TPL’s pandemic plan:

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2020/apr27/14-covid-19-emergency-response-combined.pdf>

At its meeting on May 25, 2020, the Library Board approved TPL’s reopening framework and phased reopening plan, and authorized the City Librarian to execute the phased reopening plan, adjusting it as needed based on the changing conditions and circumstances in the city and elsewhere:

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2020/may25/11-covid-19-emergency-response-plans-for-reopening-revised-combined.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Based on recommendations from Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, the City of Toronto cancelled most programming and closed a number of facilities, including recreation and community centres, city-run daycares, museums and art galleries in response to the evolving COVID-19 situation. This came into effect at the end of the day March 13, 2020, and as a result, all TPL branches were closed at the same time.

Effective March 23, 2020, the Mayor declared a state of emergency in Toronto. On Tuesday, March 31, the Mayor announced that City of Toronto facilities would continue to be closed until further notice, and that City-operated programs would also remain suspended. The mayor also announced that all City-led major mass-participation events, festivals, conferences and cultural programs would be cancelled through June 30, as would all City permits for these types of events.

On May 14, 2020, the Premier announced Stage One reopening of services effective May 19, 2020, including libraries for pick up and deliveries. On June 8, 2020, the Premier announced a regional approach to Stage Two reopening of services. This [announcement](#) indicated that some limited library services can be reinstated as part of this stage: *All libraries can reopen with limited on-site services, such as computer access and contactless book pickup and drop-off.*

There is no confirmed date for Stage Two to be in effect in Toronto.

COMMENTS

Implementation of TPL's Reopening Plans

Drop Boxes

As of June 1, 2020, 70 drop boxes opened for the return of borrowed library materials. Staff empty the drop boxes, placing materials in cardboard boxes and are storing them in the branch for a 72-hour quarantine period. When TPL closed on March 13, 2020, approximately one million items were on loan to customers. There is a steady stream of materials being returned in drop boxes.

Two issues have arisen as a result of drop boxes being opened. One issue is that the large influx of returns coupled with much a lower number of items being borrowed has resulted in a shelving capacity issue at the branches. In order to address this staff will be reinstating the deselection program to free up shelving space. The other issue

with opening the drop boxes has been that members of the public have also been placing donated books in drop boxes, which also have to be quarantined. While normally acceptable, under COVID-19 emergency measures, donations of used materials have been suspended. This continues to be communicated to the public through signage, website messaging and social media posts.

Curbside Pick Up of Holds

As of June 8, 2020, 67 branches started to make curbside service available for the pick up of holds from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday to Friday and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at most locations. Smaller branches offer the same schedule except they are closed on Mondays.

When TPL closed on March 13, approximately 40,000 holds were on branch shelves ready for pick up and another 50,000 were in the process of being prepared for customer pick up.

Customers wanting to pick up holds book a date and time using software TPL has implemented in order to safely manage the numbers of people congregating at curbside pick-up locations. Customers who do not have access to a computer can make a phone call to book a time for the pick up of their holds. Physical distancing is maintained for the staff/customer transaction; staff have masks, face shields, gloves and hand sanitizer. Security guards are assigned at the entrance of each curbside branch location to assist customers with queuing and other health and safety requirements.

Customers are thrilled with the service, with many communicating to staff how happy they are to be able to pick up their holds. In the first week of service, 9,045 curbside appointment bookings by customers to schedule their holds pick ups and 21,457 check-outs were made.

Preparations for the Reopening of In-Branch Services

Staff have been auditing branch locations to determine layout adjustments and minor renovations required for the time when in-branch services are allowed. This is Phase 3 and 4 in TPL's reopening plan:

- Phase 3
 - **Select** branches reopen with reduced hours:
 - Open branches will provide borrowing, returns, holds pick-up, information services, access to study/lounge space, computers, internet, washrooms;
 - In-branch programs and room/event rentals will not be available;
 - Food and drink, cash transactions will not be allowed.

- Phase 4
Most branches will reopen based on parameters under phase 3:
 - Bookmobile service resumes;
 - Home Library Service resumes.

Plexiglass screens are being investigated and will be installed at service desks as appropriate. Physical distancing in computer, study and lounge areas is being established by moving furniture and making some computers unavailable for use. Areas where customers line up are being equipped with markings to identify where to stand in line. Numbers of customers allowed in branch locations is being established and will be posted. Security guards will be stationed at entranceways to control numbers entering the branch. Customers will be encouraged to wear a mask and offered hand sanitizer as they enter the branch.

Signage is being posted to remind customers about the need to adhere to COVID-19 health and safety practices. Prior to entering a library branch, customers must do the self-assessment for COVID-19 as per the Ontario Ministry of Health website. If they do not pass the assessment they should not enter the library until they pass the assessment and do not have signs and symptoms of COVID-19. Individuals can also visit the City's website to determine if further care is required and learn about assessment centres.

With the June 8th provincial announcement about the limited reopening of onsite services such as computer access, staff has undertaken the following:

- identified locations that can offer safe access to computers (e.g. numbers allowed in the computer area). At the same time, identified ways to limit access to other parts of the branch (e.g. book collections);
- identified computer areas will need to have some seating removed; some computers will need to be made unavailable to ensure physical distancing;
- reviewed plans with Toronto Public Health, including use of PPE to ensure health and safety protocols are appropriate, such as the disinfecting of keyboards, desks and seating areas;
- met with TPL's Central Joint Health and Safety Committee weekly to review the update to the computer access plans for limited branch reopening.

Layout adjustments are also being made for staff workrooms and lunch areas along with numbers of staff allowed in these spaces at any one time. Staff continue to complete the Toronto Public Health screening survey each day they come to work.

Staffing

Staff throughout TPL have been working extremely hard to quickly implement new services such as the curbside pick-up of holds, have developed workflows to manage

processes such as drop box returns and the 72-hour quarantining of returned materials, have implemented training and communications to support this work, and have made adjustments to both software configurations and current layout of branches.

As of June 10th, 1,570 staff are either working remotely or on site at TPL. A total of 894 staff have been surveyed to determine which staff are interested in returning to work, or elect for Emergency leave/layoff. The result is 755 staff indicated they want to return to work with 84 of those requesting accommodation. A total of 130 staff have elected to take Emergency Leave/layoff. HR staff are following up with any remaining staff who have not yet responded to the survey.

Food Banks

In preparation for curbside service, TPL's Ellesmere delivery hub transitioned from food bank sorting and delivery back to library operations on May 23, 2020. All food bank distribution sites at library locations moved to other community locations as of June 5th with the exception of Albion and Jane Sheppard branches. The latter two locations are going to continue to distribute food hampers to customers for the next few months in an effort to support food security in those communities. In the meantime, alternate community locations for food bank distribution are under review by TPL's food bank partner.

During TPL's operation of food bank sites, over 25,000 people were served and 3,100 children's books were distributed.

Internet Connectivity Kits

One of the stark realities of the pandemic is that COVID-19 has amplified inequities. Some of the city's most vulnerable residents have been the hardest hit by the emergency. During the COVID-19 outbreak, residents who rely on the TPL for internet computers and Wi-Fi are unable to access online information, such as critical health resources or social supports; supporting online learning and education; and reducing social isolation and helping to maintain connections to families and friends.

TPL's Internet Connectivity Kit program has been developed in partnership with non-profit organization, Renewed Computer Technology (RCT), supported by donations to the Toronto Public Library Foundation, and in consultation with the City's Community Coordination Plan to ensure recipients are referred from community agencies responsible for identifying residents with the highest priority needs.

The program provides low-income residents with the equipment they need for internet access at home. Initiated as a partnership with RCT, 100 individuals received a laptop and laptop bag provided by RCT and a Wi-Fi hotspot with four months of unlimited

data provided by TPL. The data is funded through TPL Foundation donations. Participants keep the laptop and Wi-Fi hotspot at the end of the program.

This initial partnership quickly attracted more than \$200,000 in donations to the TPL Foundation funding 100 additional kits comprised of a new laptop, a Wi-Fi hotspot and two-years of unlimited data. To date, 200 TPL's Internet Connectivity Kits have been distributed and fundraising is on-going.

More recently, the City has reached out with a proposal for \$900,000 in funding to support 500 more TPL Internet Connectivity Kits – using the same model working with the City Community Coordination Plan to identify highest priority needs. The proposal is being recommended and a decision pending. The money would come from the \$7 million the Social Services Relief Fund the Province allocated for urgent needs and potentially other emergency relief grants the City is allocating.

Wi-Fi Hotspots

TPL's existing Wi-Fi Hotspot program that lends 1,000 devices for six-month loans has continued through the library closure period. The distribution method necessarily changed as a result of not being able to loan from branches. TPL worked with the City Community Coordination Plan to identify the highest priority individuals needing home internet access and with its participating agencies to distribute the devices to their clients.

Online Programming

TPL's new online programming service, *Live & Online Programs*, officially launched on May 11th. In the first three weeks, there were a total of 67 programs with 4,505 attendees/views, with 60 of these programs offered live. Programs are created for all age groups and range from online learning and digital literacy skills training to book clubs, personal finance, author talks for adults and youth, early literacy programs and storytimes for children, launched with a guest storytime from Mayor John Tory. The most popular program was author Emily St. John Mandel in Conversation with Deb Dundas with 337 attendees, and notable mention goes to TPL's Teens offerings that have included an Escape Room with 70 attendees and Research Tips Workshop with 76 attendees.

CONCLUSION

TPL is gradually reinstating library services that were suspended with the COVID-19 public health emergency, and responding to residents' needs with new programs and partnerships.

With curbside pick up of holds implemented, staff are now working to prepare branches for the limited reinstatement of in-branch services such as computer access, with fuller access anticipated in the weeks to come.

TPL will continue to monitor staffing resources. The majority of TPL staff are working remotely or on-site, while others have elected to take Emergency Leave/layoff. Working with the Central Joint Health and Safety Committee, health and safety priorities, protocols and training requirements will be reviewed and monitored as services are gradually reinstated and new programs are developed.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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