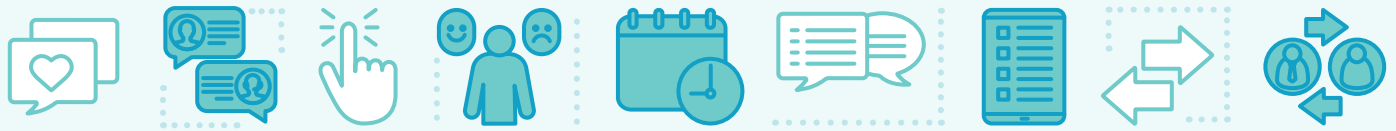# Australian libraries responding to COVID-19

Checklist for reopening libraries

As of 1 May, governments have started planning to ease restrictions on services, with the Northern Territory announcing the reopening of public library services[1] from 15 May. We anticipate greater clarity in the coming weeks about when libraries may be able to ease restrictions on services and reopen fully. While government can make broad statements about libraries reopening, the details will need to be carefully planned by library managers to mitigate any remaining risks for staff and library users. Reopening will not mean going back to the way things were pre-COVID-19; it will mean putting in place the 'new normal' approach to library services.

This is the opportunity for libraries to prioritise their existing services and refocus investment on the services which are most highly valued by users. Some services which have been established for the duration of the pandemic will need to be removed as they will be redundant; there will no longer be the capacity to deliver them, or they will no longer be permissible. However, other innovations will most likely become part of normal service.

In practical terms, there will need to be a greater focus on the safe handling of items for borrowing and display. The Institute of Museum and Library Services, OCLC and Battelle in the US[2] are collaborating to develop an evidence-based approach to safe reopening practices, providing information about how to handle materials, training and cleaning in libraries.

The International Federation of Library Associations is also gathering information about the strategies that libraries around the world are taking, as they plan to reopen their libraries.[3]

Each library will have its own plans for reopening, depending on the sector and the specific needs of the library's community, but the following checklist provides a practical framework which outlines major considerations that library managers should be addressing, when planning to reopen their library.

For more information visit alia.org.au or email advocacy@alia.org.au

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[1] coronavirus.nt.gov.au/steps-to-restart/roadmap-new-normal

[2] www.imls.gov/news/covid-19-research-partnership-inform-safe-handling-collections-reopening-practices-libraries

[3] www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries#reopening
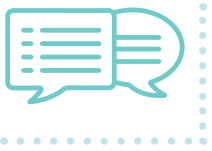
Checklist

Planning

- ☐ Risk assessment
- ☐ Operations and communications plans
- ☐ Timeline and phasing (easing of lockdown, partial reopening, full reopening)
- ☐ Celebration of full reopening

Communications

- ☐ Guidelines and training for staff
- ☐ Information for stakeholders
- ☐ Media alert through organisation's media team
- ☐ Notification of services available (English and LOTE)
- ☐ Be prepared for increased phone and email enquiries during the reopening phases
- ☐ Use the opportunity to communicate the value of the library

Social distancing measures

- ☐ Signage promoting social distancing (English and LOTE)
- ☐ Floor marking
- ☐ Rearrange furniture
- ☐ Separate entrance and exit
- ☐ Limited opening hours
- ☐ Opening hours for specific user groups
- ☐ Limit usage of spaces in the library (eg meeting rooms, café, toilets)
- ☐ Limited number of people in the library
- ☐ Limited period of time in the library
- ☐ Remove PCs to create space between terminals
- ☐ Time limits on PC sessions
- ☐ Limit numbers for face-to-face activities

Safety precautions

- ☐ Work Health and Safety risk assessment to identify high risk areas
- ☐ Cleaning schedule with focus on priority areas including shared devices and materials
- ☐ Quarantine and/or sanitise returned items
- ☐ Availability of wipes and sanitiser for staff and public use
- ☐ Install screens where social distancing measure are less effective
- ☐ Ask people who are unwell not to attend the library

Staff support

☐ Shift work to reduce the number of staff in the library

☐ Promote use of self-check stations, where available

☐ Manage expectation of face-to-face assistance for library users

Community support

☐ Extended loan periods

☐ Automatic and repeated loan renewals

☐ Waiving of fines

Operations

☐ Bring back staff

☐ Reactivate return chutes

☐ Reopen library buildings and restart mobile library service (if offered)

☐ Maintain extended home library service (if offered) or return outreach services to pre-COVID level

☐ Reintroduce, retain or phase out click and collect, kerbside pick-up

☐ Make PCs available for public use

☐ Reintroduce cash transactions

☐ Review and instate calendar of programs and events, in-person and virtual

☐ Remove virtual storytime recordings from media channels (public and school libraries)

☐ Reintroduce live large group programs and events as the final phase

☐ Consider reintroducing volunteers

☐ Review 2020-2021 budget including balance of investment in print and eresources
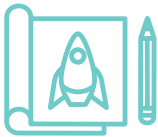
Framework

	Current status	Restrictions eased	Restrictions lifted
Planning			
Communications			
Social distancing			
Safety precautions			
Staff support			
Community support			
Operations			
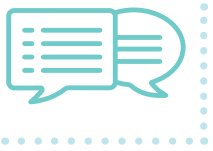
Reopening the library – what is safe?

It will be up to the library's organisation, as advised by the authorities, to determine when the library is deemed safe to reopen. This may be dependent on local circumstances, such as the prevalence of community transmission of COVID-19, and the judgement of the relevant state or territory's Chief Medical Officer. Once the library is declared safe to reopen, there are important guidelines to consider in managing the safety of staff and visitors to the library:

Physical distancing

Maintain at least 1.5 metres distance between people.

- Rearrange furniture and computer facilities.
- Provide a separate entrance and exit to the space.
- Mark out the distance from the main service points, to minimise face-to-face interaction.
- Ask people who are feeling unwell to stay away from the library.

Limit the usage of the space to one person per 4 square metres

- Calculate the area of the public floor space. Divide the area by four. Limit the number of people in the space (including staff) to this number.
- Set up a safe queueing space outside the library – marking every 1.5 metres on the ground.

Safe handling of physical materials

- Wear gloves when moving collections into quarantine and remove them immediately afterwards.
- Ask visitors to use self-checkout machines to minimise the exchange of physical items.
- Avoid handling cash or credit cards – use 'tap and go' if receiving payments.

Sanitising objects and surfaces

- Provide hand sanitiser and/or alcohol-based soap for staff and visitors.
- Clean and disinfect computer equipment between uses.
- Avoid the sharing of close-contact equipment such as headphones and VR headsets.

Quarantining and sanitising collections

- For paper-based products, leave books untouched in a dedicated quarantine area for a 24-hour period prior to handling and recirculating. Sanitising books with liquid disinfectants can damage books and is not recommended.
- For DVDs or other materials with plastic covers, wipe them down with alcohol wipes.
- Clean and disinfect hard, high-touch surfaces, such as railings, doorknobs, faucets, light switches, at least once a day – more often if possible.

This information has been gathered based on guidelines provided by Safe Work Australia[4] and advice provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)[5] and the Northeast Document Conservation Center.[6]

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[4] www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industry-information
[5] www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=imls-cdc-on-staff-safety-handling-paper-in-covid-19-pandemic
[6] www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/NEDCC%20recommendations%20for%20disinfecting%20books_Mar2020-converted.pdf