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TO: Board of Directors
FROM: SLA Task Force for Reopening Specialized Libraries
DATE: August 7, 2020
RE: SLA Guidelines for Reopening Specialized Libraries Report

1. Introduction, Context and Scope
2. Summary of Emerging Themes for Reopening Specialized Libraries and Recommendation
3. Recommendations and Conclusion
4. Appendix
5. ATTACH: Resources List for Reopening Specialized Libraries & Appendix

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Guidelines for Reopening Specialized Libraries

1. Introduction, Context and Scope

After 10 weeks of looking at the Reopening of Specialized Libraries, we are in no doubt that this is an unprecedented time, which brings great challenges requiring swift adjustments to library and information services both in the physical and online spaces.

There are different levels of planning for libraries that traditionally have more reliance on physical books and have more face-to-face interactions with patrons, compared to many corporate and some public libraries, whereby most staff have been working from homes and have access to digital or remote resources and equipment. Therefore these guidelines are not meant as a one-size-fits-all as libraries themselves vary greatly, as do the regions and communities which they serve. We hope these top-level insights and observations will be a useful guide for reopening specialized libraries.

Wellbeing and Health and Safety

One of the key guiding principles and priorities for libraries closing and reopening is health and safety, including the physical and mental wellbeing of staff and patrons. Other factors required by good leadership are valuing the wellbeing of staff and patrons, and endorsing a duty-of-care culture by supporting staff to work from home as much as possible at this challenging time. Health and safety rules are also guided by local, regional and government guidelines, which is reliant on the impact of the pandemic in their regions, and can be inconsistent at times. Generally, libraries that are reopening are seeking to re-introduce services in a phased manner to mitigate against any risks, as well as to use a gradual reopening as a learning and testing experiment.

Major considerations for re-opening libraries include ensuring safety through social distancing, the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), increased cleaning, altered signage, etc. Libraries have had to change their access to remote services where possible, and may be decreasing random visits onsite by introducing by appointment only. Many others have also introduced curbside, 'click and collect' and/or postal services. Another risk highlighted to the health and wellbeing of library staff is that of the commute in and out of their workplace during the pandemic. Therefore, where possible, greater flexibility with working patterns, work flows and the ratio in the quantity of staff to patrons needs to be taken into consideration in any reopening plans for services.

Some of the issues surrounding health and wellbeing have also been equity, accessibility and inclusion issues for staff as well as library patrons. This period has been a time of social unrest (e.g. Black Lives Matter protests) in some countries which has added more complexity and highlighted inequalities which need to be considered in reopening libraries and providing library and information services.

During this pandemic, there has been an increasing awareness of negative impacts on mental wellbeing. There is written evidence that mental health and wellbeing has been one of the most challenging aspects of both work and personal life. More open conversations, access to treatment and ways to promote health and wellbeing should be made available, such as Employee Assisted Programs. Staff should also be encouraged to take annual leave, even in a pandemic, as the need to take a break from work-related challenges must be taken into consideration.

Greater staff flexibility such as working from home or working reduced hours where possible are some of the options offered to staff. Providing assurances of increased hygiene and safety measures in

workplaces, with socially distanced areas for staff returning to work, and for visiting patrons, also needs to be built in to ensure that the risks to health and wellbeing are minimized. These healthy workplace actions will facilitate building more personal and institutional resilience into this unpredictable time and for any future crisis.

We have attached a great example of crisis management entitled ‘Hierarchy of Controls Diagram’ (Power Point and MS Word versions) which was adapted by Bronwyn Smyth from the UBC Library’s COVID-19 Safety Plan and the City of Vancouver safety talk – please see **Appendix Two**.

Communication and Digital Services

Clear and timely communication in this time of on-going change and upheaval is key for problem solving, and is an essential part of making plans for the continuation and/or discontinuation of services. This includes clear and timely communication with library personnel, patrons and any stakeholders such as suppliers and information vendors. This pandemic provides a great learning experience to ensure your preparedness for crisis management, as well as business continuation and service continuity. Important things to communicate include changes to operational services, strategic changes in direction (e.g. universities moving to online classes), project plans, service level agreements, websites and marketing collateral, and any other general changes to services. The use of digital channels to communicate, as well as traditional means such as post, in person or telephone, are being used to ensure access to justice and social care, and it is important to make sure that no one is excluded due to the digital divide and accessibility barriers.

Recovery Planning

Planning for phased openings is an ideal way to prioritize areas where libraries can gradually allow staff as well as patrons back into their physical spaces. This also allows for greater flexibility should there be a need to close parts of the library if there are increases in COVID-19 infections, or in cases of a second wave of the pandemic. Some library staff are working in small teams, or bubbles, to ensure that there are fewer interactions between groups of staff, and to facilitate quick communication should there be a need for contact tracing.

A common threat to libraries reopening is the lack of support for future funding. In this economically challenging time, with less use of physical spaces and resources, there may be pressures to budgetary commitments such as physical resources and equipment on site. Even where there is an essential need for print collections and physical spaces, some SLA members fear that there will be further pressures on their budgets and physical space, possibly even the loss of their libraries. One example is a university library that switched to using e-books instead of hard copies due to their closed library facility. This raises concerns for hard copy collections and viability of physical spaces in the short term. However, one SLA member sees this as an opportunity to finally make the switch to being fully digital, by getting rid of the physical reports that they have been hanging onto in their law library. There will be different levels of planning for physical spaces and digital services with budget considerations due to access restrictions, or opportunities, caused by the pandemic.

Threats and Change Management

The threat of moving all your services online or digitally also has put pressure on the loss of our physical spaces. Already cramped areas or physical spaces may be lost due to under-utilisation. The real threat to physical spaces, library resources and staff as well as further projects and funding are some of the

challenges being faced due to budget constraints, cuts in funding, as well as loss of commercial revenue and income streams.

Access to digital resources is affecting all of these changes and there may be increased negotiations for remote access, as well as changes in access to electronic resources. There are also technical issues such as broadband bandwidth, as well as equity in access to equipment – for example, not everyone has access to IT, smartphones or mobile data capacity. This is true for library staff and patrons, as well as the wider global community. Outreach, curbside and mobile libraries are some of the ways that these issues can be mitigated or supported. There has been media coverage that states that outreach and lending of books and other resources have increased, and this can be seen as an opportunity for services that provide remote lending services.

For those organisations that are open, the handling of items needs to follow strict regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including the quarantine of items, which have been handled. The amount of time recommended for quarantine ranges from 24 hours to 72 hours, depending on different materials and organisational policies. There is current research being conducted by OCLC in the REALM Project (Reopening Archives Libraries and Museum), and their results and recommendations are posted on their website (<https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/realm-happening-now.html>).

2. Summary of Emerging Themes for Reopening Specialized Libraries and Recommendations

I. Health and Safety of staff and patrons should be a priority in all circumstances.

a. Sub-theme: Reducing Risks with adopting a Phased Return with a Plan

- We recommend engaging in a phased-in approach, taking every opportunity to reduce risks, and having an action plan in place in case of second waves of infections. This will allow progressive phasing out of restrictions or a possible return to restrictions if the virus begins to spread more actively within your community.
- Reopening libraries in stages also allows flexibility if you need to test scenarios, and evaluate staff and user experience
- Also take this opportunity to review your fire safety and exit and emergency plans for physical spaces.

b. Sub-theme: Safety of Library Staff

- Where possible, staff should work from home.
- When staff are required to be physically present in workspaces, a schedule should be in place to ensure that there are fewer library staff in the workspaces at any time.
- Staff should have a dedicated workstation if possible. If not possible, workstations should be sanitized between staff members.
- Risk Assessments should be carried out regularly to ensure that changes are taken into consideration.
- Working in groups or bubbles is highly practical to prevent infections and in case of contact tracing.

c. Sub-theme: Physical Spaces Preparedness

- Physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet) should be observed
 - Use of tape (e.g. painters tape) on floors to remind staff and patrons to maintain physical distancing, or to block off areas.
 - If possible, implement a one-way system throughout the building, especially in typically congested areas

- Protective equipment
 - On returning to work, staff should be provided with PPE
 - Gloves to handle materials and equipment
 - Staff should be taught the proper way to remove gloves in order to minimise the risk of contamination. Hands should be washed with soap and water, or hand sanitizer should be used, after removal of gloves
 - Masks should be worn whenever possible, especially when required by jurisdiction, and if physical distancing cannot be maintained or physical barriers are not in place
 - Acrylic barriers in front of staff stations at any service desk
 - Acrylic barriers between staff stations where the spacing is too close
- Increased hand sanitizer stations and hand washing stations (if possible)
- Cleaning
 - Sufficient cleaning materials for staff and user areas.
 - Reducing service hours to facilitate increased cleaning by staff (during the day) and outside cleaning staff (end of day).
- Minimal or no use of kitchen areas
 - Increased signage to direct users to areas to use materials or workstations.

d. Subtheme: Safety of Library Patrons

- Wherever possible, re-opening under a ‘By Appointment Only’ model
 - Library patrons can book appointments to limit the number of persons in the library spaces at one time
 - Where appropriate, walk-ins may schedule appointments or be allowed access if space capacity has not reached its set maximum. This is particularly important if patrons lack the means to book via the internet or phone
 - If patrons have to queue to enter the library space, provide adequate signage to encourage the maintenance of physical distancing
 - Promote the use of digital programs and content, and where possible, provide patron service via email, phone, LMS, including online literacy services
- Use signage to direct users around physical space and convey important information
- If possible, implement a one-way system throughout the space (e.g. separate entry and exit points), especially in typically congested areas
- Remove any extra furniture (e.g. chairs), and reconfigure space to encourage patrons not to touch extra surfaces and reduce the amount of cleaning needed
- Use chat and online reference system features if available

e. Sub-theme: Preparing Materials

- Library patrons, whenever possible should pre-order items before visit
 - Gloves should be used by staff to handle the ordered material
 - If gloves are not available, staff members should wash or sanitize their hands prior to pulling the material and allow the material to sit for recommended quarantine time (ranging from 24-72 hours) untouched before the patron’s visit
 - Scheduled curb side holds and material pick up to reduce the number of patrons entering the physical library space
 - Limit the amount of checked-out material to allow the quarantined area from being overwhelmed
 - Encourage the use of digital materials where the item is available in both physical and digital formats

f. Sub-theme: Quarantine of Materials

Set aside a dedicated area for quarantined material

- Material ideally should sit for 72 hours (3 days)
 - Place a sign on cart to remind staff members that the material is in quarantine, and include the date the material went into quarantine to help ensure it sits for 72 hours
 - Re-shelve library material after the 72-hour period. Sanitize cart after re-shelving material, and wash hands.

g. Sub-theme: Workstations/Computer/Self-serve equipment

- Limit time at computers, equipment and workstations to allow for free flowing traffic of patrons, prevent time blockages, and to allow staff to sanitize after use
 - If cleaning the self-service computers and equipment after each use is unfeasible, the use should be restricted or off-limits to patrons
- Workstations should be spaced out to allow for physical distancing between patrons. This may result in computer workstations being off-limits to maintain proper spacing. Remove any keyboards, etc. that may tempt a patron to use such workstations.
- Use a desk/workstation numbering system and assign to patron

II. Theme: Offer more digital services

- Promote the use of digital programs and content, and where possible, provide patron service via email, phone, LMS, including online literacy services
 - Use video conferencing for events
 - Develop a schedule of digital programming
 - Develop promotional materials for public awareness
 - Increased ordering of digital titles
 - Providing training in the use of digital resources on a regular basis

III. Theme: Potential Physical Space Loss Concerns

- Start dialog with decision makers about reasons to keep square footage/space:
 - Need to provide more separation (physical distancing) of staff
 - Shared work spaces should be eliminated where possible
 - Need to provide more separation (physical distancing) of patrons
 - Space computers and workstations further apart
 - Need room to house quarantined materials
 - Be receptive to flexible use of space, e.g. extra-curricular activities in library space during periods of low usage

IV. Theme: Potential Budget Reductions

- Start dialog with decision makers about reasons to keep and/or increase funding
 - Funds needed for
 - Increased digital/e-collection subscriptions
 - Multiple copies of frequently circulated items to maintain availability when returned items are in quarantine
 - Demonstrate to decision-makers that library staff are negotiating with vendors to reduce costs for annual subscriptions and other resources whenever possible
 - Use usage figures as evidence of growth or cull areas of service or provision

V. Theme: Staff Deployment and Recruitment

- Rather than cutting staff due to budget constraints, consider if staff could be moved to other areas so roles can be saved rather than lost.
 - Advocate to protect library workers from loss of employment
 - Libraries are in a good position to offer digital services that may temporarily replace those that are physical

- Use our wide and varied network to support each other where gaps exist
- There are personal development resources available to help persons in need of skills development and training from SLA Resources
- Make contact with your Trade Unions for support and advice

VI. Theme: Social Justice and Accessibility

- There can be high levels of inequality, poverty, exclusion and inaccessibility experienced by both staff and patrons
 - Make provisions for hard copy, digital resources and equipment for staff and patrons
 - Make allowances for persons who are not able to access digital resources by providing support in traditional ways but with social distancing measures
 - Provide information on support that is available when your physical spaces are closed e.g. posters with contact telephone numbers
 - There are digital toolkits to fight for more accessibility and social justice but ironically these may only be digital
 - There are large numbers of persons with disabilities and accessibility issues. Their needs have to be addressed, and support should be given from our professional as well as local communities
 - Partnerships with local support and public libraries can be used to assist with supporting marginalised communities

VII. Theme: Smart Technology to Implement

- This is a time for great innovations for use in social distancing between library staff and patrons, as well as in the delivery of services
 - Use smart technology to help you maintain social distancing e.g. make use of location alarms to detect if persons are too close to each other, to monitor patron flow around the library facility, and leverage this to determine spaces where persons are unable to maintain social distancing, i.e. entrances, narrow corridors, etc.
 - The use of AI, machine learning and virtual reality applications offer opportunities for streamlined processes requiring less human interactions
 - Use data and management information regarding occupancy and/or resources usage to help with future planning and service development
 - Digital road-maps can be used to program new ways of working and services

3. Recommendations and Conclusion

We are still collecting, processing, researching and understanding some of the issues being faced by reopening specialized libraries, their staff and patrons, in this time of immense change and challenges. Generally, libraries have not closed during the pandemic as services continue to be provided digitally or remotely, and there is a lot of planning behind the scenes. There are detrimental issues that are affecting everyone, including economic and social change, together with upheaval in our communities and with stakeholders. However, there are opportunities to learn, adapt and plan for this current pandemic scenario, as well as other future crises and unexpected library closures. Here are our top-level recommendations and conclusions:

- We need to put our commitment to services and our communities at the heart of what we are doing, with safety and wellbeing being paramount and our top priority. Compassionate leadership, empathy and understanding for our communities and the people we are responsible for must be demonstrated by library and information professionals.

- Physical and mental wellbeing are a guiding theme in all libraries across all sectors, and this must be given priority as the risks for negative impacts are greater in a pandemic. Provisions must be made to make people feel safe and reassured. The highest standards need to be used in order to prevent the spread of infections, and maintaining mental and physical wellbeing should be taken very seriously. Developing and encouraging mindfulness, as well as offering personal resilience training is recommended for staff and patrons (where possible).
- As a professional organisation, we should ensure that support is offered to our membership and communities through this time of great change and challenges, and the work of this Task Force should continue to inform our community and the SLA Board in the months, perhaps years ahead.
- With these challenges come great insights, which will be shared through learning and consulting experiences in all aspects of reopening libraries, to inform and help us all prepare and plan for current and future crises. The knowledge we gain at this time will inform many aspects of the profession but also specialized libraries now and in the future, and we can re-use this knowledge for sharing at future conference insights and programming, e.g. SLA Europe hopes some insights will be shared at their future conference or events.
- Some organisations are able to respond very quickly to crises such as COVID-19 as they have become resilient to unexpected changes over time and have engaged in crisis planning and service continuity exercises. The need for remote working and business contingency planning is one of the best lessons learnt from this global pandemic. We recommend that libraries develop and maintain service recovery plans and training in areas such as Crisis Preparedness and Business Contingency Planning.
- Phased Reopening is recommended as an iteration of the problems we are trying to solve, but also necessary in implementing gradual return to services, perhaps with adjustments. A phased reopening plan prevents services becoming overwhelmed, and also allows for adjustments to various aspects such as staffing levels, commuting issues, being inundated with visits from patrons etc. Most importantly, reopening in phases allows for swift action should libraries have to close again in case there are increases in cases of Covid-19 infections, or in the case where the threat of the ‘Second Wave’ is realized as we go into the winter months in the northern hemisphere, and until there is a cure for the coronavirus Covid-19.
- Funding for services and staffing is under real threat in these economically challenging times. It is recommended that staff make use of digital services, seek new methods and areas of outreach and remote services, and/or consider redeploying staff until there is a recovery to regular services. Where advocacy resources fail to prevent the loss of jobs, providing support and continued learning through our network will be necessary in cases of redundancies, as well as to encourage library and information professionals into other roles where possible.
- Our shared global experience and insights are key factors of this pandemic. We can develop policies and protocols with an abundance of best practice from our own experiences, and also those of other organisations across the globe and our SLA network. Some of these best practices and insights are highlighted in our Appendix Resources List for Reopening Specialized Libraries.
- Advocacy for libraries and library staff is an area where we need greater support as this pandemic has affected all libraries, in all sectors. Therefore advocating for libraries and information professionals, with evidence of the value we add, is very important. We should advocate how information professionals can support economic as well as social, learning, cultural, educational

and wellbeing recovery, including basic information and literacy services. This is especially for staff at risk of losing jobs, and in communities who may have accessibility and inequality issues.

- The ‘Future of the Library’ has been brought forward as a result of this time of closures and reopening during the crisis of the pandemic. We must see this as an opportunity to continue to innovate, evolve and adapt to these changes, and also build-in future programming for our libraries, and for ourselves as professionals. “Never waste a crisis” as one academic stated in our research.
- Next steps - A second Round Table has been programmed for 3rd September 2020 14:00pm ET (<https://www.sla.org/learn-2/sla-live-virtual-events/>) to further discuss any issues for the autumn return when most organisations will be increasing capacity in workplaces, and reintroducing services after the summer months. This is also an opportunity to present your own experiences and insights in the call for papers for the SLA Conference 2020.

4. Appendix

- (1) Resources list for Reopening Specialized Libraries
- (2) Hierarchy of Control adapted from UBC Library’s COVID-19 Safety Plan and the City of Vancouver safety talk.
- (3) Examples of Signage from Solano Libraries
- (4) Example of International Standard in Social Distancing