



QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY

REOPENING PLAN

**QPL'S PATH FORWARD
IN THE ERA OF COVID-19**

June 29, 2020

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INTRODUCTION

In order to help stem the spread of COVID-19, Queens Public Library closed all of our physical locations on March 16, 2020. Since then, thanks to our dedicated and talented staff, we have adapted quickly and resolutely to meet our mission, delivering critical services, programs, and resources to the public remotely and offering everyone – no matter who they are, where they come from, or the challenges of our uncertain times – the chance to realize the promise of their lives.

At the same time, we have been thoughtfully and carefully formulating a plan for the eventual reopening of our sites, with the health and safety of Library staff and customers at the forefront of every decision we make. We recognize the disproportionate toll the virus has taken on our communities and will reopen cautiously, gradually, and intentionally, in stages, starting with a small number of locations offering limited service to the public and expanding over time as circumstances allow.

A Reopening Task Force including leadership and staff across departments has worked to develop this plan, in consultation with the Library's Board of Trustees and our union partners, and informed by evolving City, State, and Federal guidance, executive orders, and laws, information and recommendations from public health authorities, and experiences of other organizations around the world. We also have been coordinating with Brooklyn Public Library and The New York Public Library and ensuring consistency of service across the city. We will continually assess and refine our service delivery model, operating procedures, and the ways staff work, monitoring and responding to shifting conditions and to emerging guidance, information, feedback, and evaluation.

As we begin to step cautiously back into our physical spaces and welcome customers inside, the Library will continue to reimagine and expand our services and respond to the diverse needs of the public. We know our staff and the communities we serve are resilient and strong, and together, in the face of the ongoing crisis, we will rebuild.

Dennis M. Walcott
President and CEO

HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES

At all stages and levels of service, the Library will continue to follow the most up-to-date guidance from public health officials in order to ensure the safety of staff and customers. Health and safety practices and protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 will remain in effect as long as necessary.

Personal Protective Equipment and Cleaning and Disinfectant Supplies

- Staff will be required to wear a mask at work any time they are within six feet of another person except when not advised for health reasons or due to emergency circumstances.
- Reusable cloth face masks will be issued to each staff person to wear while working on-site.
- Customers and other visitors to Library locations will be required to wear face coverings when entering and inside our buildings, as reflected in signage at these locations.
- Disposable gloves will be available for staff to wear as needed.
- Disinfectant cleaners will be available for regular surface cleaning as needed.
- Hand sanitizer, containing 60% or more alcohol, will be available for staff as well as customers.

Physical Distancing

- Library staff will practice physical distancing with respect to other library staff, customers, and other visitors, maintaining six feet of distance between people unless safety or a core function of the work activity requires a shorter distance.
- Staff and public spaces will be configured in order to help ensure distancing and a safe environment.
- Wellness and safety barriers, sneeze guards, and stanchions will be installed in staff and public areas as needed.
- Signage and floor markers will be used to denote appropriate spacing and foot traffic flow for staff and the public.
- Occupancy of spaces such as workrooms, staff lounges, and elevators will be limited depending on the size of the spaces, and tightly confined spaces will be occupied at below 50% capacity.
- Customer access to and use of buildings will be limited.
- In-person staff gatherings and meetings will be limited, and teleconferencing or videoconferencing will be used whenever possible.
- The sharing of objects among staff should be limited, and the touching of shared surfaces discouraged.

HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES

Education, Training, and Support

Staff will participate in training regarding new service models, health and safety practices and protocols, respiratory and blood-borne pathogens, hand hygiene, and use of PPE, including the necessary regular cleaning of Library-issued face coverings. The Library will continue to provide updated guidance and resources to staff, as well as support for their well-being and mental health. Informing and educating the public about COVID-19, ways to prevent transmission, and mental health issues will also remain critical.

Health Screening

As currently required by NYS Executive Order, before reporting to work on-site each day, staff will be required to complete a wellness questionnaire regarding known COVID-19 exposure and symptoms over the past 14 days. Staff who have tested positive for COVID-19, exhibited symptoms associated with COVID-19, or have been in close contact with someone with a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case in the past 14 days will not report to work. Staff will be required to take their temperatures each day before reporting to work. The Library will review such staff assessments daily and document its review.

Signage and other communications will direct customers not to enter if they have symptoms associated with COVID-19 or have had known exposure to someone with COVID-19.

Infection Response

In the event that an employee or other individual who has been on-site at a Library location has a reported confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, the Library will respond immediately to prevent potential spread according to the Library's Infection Response Protocol, including:

- Making required notifications: Internally, a Library Health and Safety official will work with the employee and their supervisor to determine the need and extent of notification of individuals (e.g., other employees or visitors) who may have come in contact with the employee. Externally, a Library Health and Safety official will contact state and local health departments responsible for contact tracing.
- Supporting ongoing contact tracing efforts and providing information required by public health regulators.
- Disinfecting affected areas.
- Providing employees necessary leave from work.

HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES

Facilities Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Maintenance

- Cleaning and disinfecting protocols are in place, and custodians will continue to participate in training on proper cleaning and disinfecting. Custodial staff will maintain daily logs documenting cleaning and disinfecting work performed at each location. Necessary equipment and supplies, including EPA-registered cleaning products, have been stocked.
- Prior to the return of other staff to Library locations, custodians will clean according to CDC and NYS DOH protocols and ensure that hand sanitizing stations are available, and soap dispensers are filled in branch bathrooms and staff lounges.
- Maintainers will inspect branches prior to reopening and address any needed maintenance and repairs. HVAC systems have been and will be maintained regularly to ensure optimum performance.
- Frequently touched surfaces like tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, and touch screens will be cleaned and disinfected routinely.
- Restrooms will be available for use by staff and will be cleaned and disinfected routinely.
- Staff common areas will be cleaned and disinfected routinely. Disinfectant supplies will be available for all staff to use as desired.
- High-contact areas accessed by customers will be cleaned and disinfected routinely.
- The Library's cleaning and disinfecting protocol will be routinely reviewed and updated to reflect updated guidelines from public health agencies.

Materials Handling

The Library will follow guidance from public health authorities and the REALM (REopening Archives, Libraries and Museums) project, a research partnership between OCLC, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and Battelle focused on creating and distributing science-based information and recommended practices to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, including how library materials should be handled. In accordance with the latest recommendations and best practices, returned items will be quarantined in designated containers before being processed and checked in, shelved in the collection, designated for customer pick-up, or sent for fulfillment at another location.

Staff handling returned materials and processing materials will wear face masks and gloves and practice regular hand washing, including washing hands before and after handling materials.

DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE

The Library's response to the pandemic necessitated a quick pivot in our approach to how and where staff work and demonstrated the overall effectiveness of a distributed workforce. Ensuring that our staff are healthy, safe, and supported as we reopen our physical locations and embrace a shared vision of our organization will require continued flexibility and assessment. We surveyed staff about commutes, barriers to and concerns about returning to the workplace, and supports needed and are taking these issues into account.

The scheduling of staff and the determination of how and where they will work will be made in coordination with their respective department supervisors, with consideration of the following:

- Whether or not the staff member's core responsibilities require them to be on-site
- Minimizing the number of staff occupying building spaces at any one time
- The assignment of branch public service staff to separate, non-overlapping teams
- The feasibility of staggered start times
- The ability for staff to work remotely to complete their work and perform their duties according to the library's Telecommuting Policy
- Guidance from government, laws, and public health authorities

The Library will work to provide accommodations for vulnerable employees at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including telecommuting arrangements according to the Library's Telecommuting Policy and tasks that reduce contact with customers and other staff. Other circumstances will be considered in evaluating leave requests in accordance with applicable laws and the Library's leave policies.

COMMUNICATIONS

We will continue to update the Library's internal and external stakeholders regularly about each stage of reopening through our regular channels, including email, website, virtual meetings, signage, social media, and press outreach. Stakeholders include staff, Local 1321 partners, Board of Trustees, Foundation Board of Directors, customers, City officials, elected officials, Friends of Queens Public Library, volunteers, donors, and press.

Internal Communications

- Ensure communications for internal and external stakeholders are informed by regular updates from departments across the system
- Communicate with staff and both boards via regular emails from Dennis Walcott, members of the Management Council, Health and Safety, and Human Resources
- Continue weekly staff newsletters
- Provide staff with information on protocols, policies, and supports
- Convene all-staff meetings at milestone moments
- Create and install signage and graphics for all workplaces to reinforce health and safety practices and protocols, including physical distancing, correct use of PPE, proper handwashing, and space configuration
- Manage and refine messaging and talking points as needed

External Communications

- Ensure communications for internal and external stakeholders are informed by regular updates from departments across the system
- Connect with customers and other stakeholders via regular emails and newsletters
- Create and manage website and social media content
- Engage press to disseminate key messages to the public
- Manage and refine messaging talking points as needed
- Create and deliver signage and graphics for all public spaces to reinforce health and safety practices and protocols, including physical distancing, face mask requirements, proper handwashing, use of library spaces, and available services
- Produce and disseminate videos to the public to reinforce new protocols
- Provide multilingual messaging as needed

DIGITAL COLLECTIONS AND PROGRAMS

Recognizing the enduring demand for and reliance on digital resources, particularly during these times, we will continue to strengthen our collection of e-books and other digital materials and to offer virtual programs, services, activities, and events on our website, social media channels, and other platforms for people of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances. We also remain committed to finding ways to serve individuals and communities who do not have ready access to information and communication technologies and the Internet.

STAGES OF REOPENING

The reopening of the Library's physical locations will occur in three main stages, contingent on State and City guidelines and thorough preparation for the return of staff and the public. We will initially open seven branches for pickup service and returns and staff an additional nine locations, not open to the public, to accept returns. Continual feedback and assessment will inform the gradual expansion of access and service. Appropriate health and safety protocols will be in place throughout all stages.

STAGES OF REOPENING OVERVIEW			
PREPARATION STAGE	STAGE 1 TO-GO SERVICE	STAGE 2 LIMITED ACCESS	STAGE 3 NEW QPL
<p>All locations remain closed to the public</p> <p>Public services and programs remain online only</p> <p>Limited access only for staff essential to preparing facilities, signage, IT, and public service operations</p> <p>Select locations used by the City for polling, COVID-19 testing, and other purposes</p>	<p>Public may enter select locations for pickup of materials on hold only and may return materials at external return machines. (Initially 7 locations)</p> <p>Public may return materials at the exterior of additional select locations. (Initially 9 locations)</p> <p>No browsing No in-person reference service No seating No public computer usage No meeting room availability No book donations No public restrooms Public programs online only</p> <p>Mail-a-Book to restart</p> <p>Select locations used by the City for polling, COVID-19 testing, and other purposes</p>	<p>Public may access limited, modified spaces for browsing, computer usage, in-person reference, and appointment-based services.</p> <p>No meeting room availability No book donations Public programs online Limited in-person public programs</p> <p>Limited mobile library service</p> <p>The number of locations and breadth of services to be determined based on internal and external conditions.</p> <p>Select locations used by the City for polling, COVID-19 testing, and other purposes</p>	<p>Expanded services that reflect the new realities to include additional use of space and public programs and events, as conditions allow</p> <p>All locations open with appropriate limitations in place</p>

STAGES OF REOPENING

	STAGE 1 TO-GO SERVICE	STAGE 2 LIMITED ACCESS	STAGE 3 NEW QPL
Library Cards	eCards, full card registration online	eCards, full card registration online, assessment of in-person registration	eCards, full card registration online and in-person
E-materials Borrowing	Yes		
Materials Reserve and Pickup	Yes		
Materials Returns	Yes		
Materials Browsing	No	Limited	Yes
Mail-a-Book Home Delivery	Yes		
General Seating	No	Limited	Assessed for Expansion
Virtual Reference (Chat and email)	Yes		
Telephone Reference	Yes		
In-Person Reference	No	Limited	Yes

STAGES OF REOPENING

	STAGE 1 TO-GO SERVICE	STAGE 2 LIMITED ACCESS	STAGE 3 NEW QPL
Public Computer Use	No	Limited By appointment	Yes
Laptop Borrowing	No	Limited	Yes
Virtual Programs and Events	Yes		
In-Person Programs and Events	No	Limited	Assessed for Expansion
Meeting Rooms	No		Assessed for Expansion
Mobile Library	No	Limited	Yes
Outreach	Virtual only	Limited	Yes
Job & Business Academy (JBA)	Virtual only	Limited By appointment	Yes
New Americans Program (NAP)	Virtual only	Limited By appointment	Yes
Adult Learning Centers	Virtual only	Limited By appointment	Yes

STAGES OF REOPENING

	STAGE 1 TO-GO SERVICE	STAGE 2 LIMITED ACCESS	STAGE 3 NEW QPL
Children's Play Spaces	No		Assessed for Expansion
IDNYC (Central, Flushing)	No	Coordinate with the City (HRA)	
UPK (Woodhaven)	Not in session (2019-20 school year ended)	Coordinate with the City (DOE and DOHMH)	
Queensbridge Tech Lab	Virtual only	Limited By appointment	Yes
Teen Centers (Cambria Heights, Far Rockaway)	No	Limited	Yes
Census Support	Virtual and Phone only	Limited By appointment	Yes
Volunteers	Virtual only	Limited	Assessed for Expansion
In-Person Staff Conferences	No		Limited
Book Donations	No		Assessed for Expansion
Hot Spot Lending	450 devices currently loaned out through DOE (Look to expand)	Assessed for Expansion	
Long-Range Wi-Fi	Currently at 17 locations (Look to expand)	Assessed for Expansion	

STAGE 1: TO-GO SERVICE

During Stage 1, the service model will allow customers to enter a designated area of the library to pick up and check out items placed on hold only. They will be able to return materials at external return machines. The number of staff and customers in the location at one time will be limited. Health and safety protocols will be in place.

Staff and customer interactions will be limited in nature and duration and allow for physical distancing. Customers will be able to request materials for pickup through the Library website, mobile app, and telephone.

There will be no browsing, public computer usage, meeting room availability, public restrooms, book donations, or public programs or events at the branches. Reference service will not be available in person, but Virtual Reference Service will be available through email, chat, and phone. For any questions about their accounts, customers will be advised to call the Library. Any outstanding payments need to be made by credit card only, and staff will work

with customers to reduce any barriers to borrowing materials. The assessment of fines and fees will be suspended through at least September 30, 2020.

Signage will make clear the services available, instructions for pickup, and hours of operation. In addition, signage, floor markers, and physical barriers will indicate appropriate physical distancing for staff and customers outside and inside each building.

Initially, seven locations will be open for to-go service and exterior returns, and an additional nine locations, open only to staff to fulfill hold requests, will accept returns at external return machines or book drops. These locations were selected based on multiple factors, including geographic distribution and building condition, size, and layout.

The decision to open subsequent locations to the public for to-go service will come only after a careful assessment of the public health situation and the experiences of these first locations, including the flow of service, safety, and other factors.

Initial Locations To-Go Service

Bayside
Bellerose
East Elmhurst
Kew Gardens Hills
Laurelton
Long Island City
Peninsula

Initial Locations Fulfillment Services and Returns

Astoria
Cambria Heights
Central
Flushing
Jackson Heights
Queensboro Hill
Rego Park
Ridgewood
South Ozone Park

STAGE 1: TO-GO SERVICE

Stage 1 hours of operation and staff schedules are subject to change over time. All locations open to the public will close for one hour in the middle of the service day (not including Tuesdays) for cleaning and disinfecting.

Hours Open to the Public (initial seven locations)

Monday	10:00 AM to 5:00 PM (closed 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM)
Tuesday	1:00 PM to 5:00 PM
Wednesday	10:00 AM to 5:00 PM (closed 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM)
Thursday	12:00 PM to 7:00 PM (closed 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM)
Friday	10:00 AM to 5:00 PM (closed 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM)
Saturday	10:00 AM to 5:00 PM (closed 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM)
Sunday	CLOSED

Branch Staffing Model

Public service staff assigned to each location will work as three separate teams, with each team rotating days on a weekly basis. Custodial staff teams will also work on a rotating schedule. Staff schedules will incorporate regular breaks. As conditions change, the staffing model will change as well.

Mail-a-Book

Mail-a-Book home delivery services will restart in order to serve homebound customers. Staff handling home delivery materials will use PPE including masks and gloves and will follow handwashing protocols.

City Partnerships

In partnership with the City of New York, select Library locations will be used as polling sites, COVID-19 testing sites, and cooling centers, as well as for other targeted purposes. For example, Jackson Heights was identified as an early voting location, and Windsor Park is now serving as a City COVID-19 testing site until September 30.

STAGE 2: LIMITED ACCESS

During Stage 2, limited services will be gradually reintroduced in modified spaces, and public access will increase but remain limited. Health and safety protocols will remain in place. The number of locations entering Stage 2 and the breadth of services will be determined based on internal and external conditions. At a given time, some locations may be in Stage 1 while others are in Stage 2, and even while in Stage 2, their offerings may differ.

Customers may browse the collection. Public computers will be available with proper spacing between stations. As feasible, limited seating areas and reading tables will be available. Public restrooms will be available. In-person reference will resume, although Virtual Reference Service will be available and encouraged. Meeting rooms will not be available for reservation, and book donations will not be accepted.

Appointment-based services may be available, such as Census 2020 support, and assistance through the Job & Business Academy, New Americans Program, and Adult Learning Centers.

Public programs will remain largely online. However, in-person library programming and events that can be accomplished while providing adequate physical distancing will be considered. Library programs may require registration with participation limited to the number of people who can safely occupy the programming space while maintaining physical distancing.

Mobile library service may be considered for outreach services and for libraries undergoing renovation. The types of service available, as well as the number of customers and staff on the mobile library, will be limited in accordance with health and safety protocols and physical distancing.

STAGE 3: NEW QPL

Stage 3 contemplates an expanded service model that offers public service at all locations, providing access to their entire spaces and additional in-person program activities as conditions allow, while maintaining necessary health and safety protocols and service limitations that reflect our changed world.

In the 124 years since its founding, Queens Public Library has demonstrated time and again the unique ability to meet the ever-changing needs of our communities, even in the face of adversity. We stand ready to deliver for the public amid unprecedented challenges and are eager to make our physical spaces and resources available again to them as safely and carefully as possible. We look forward to working with all of our stakeholders to confront and shape our new reality and to providing outstanding service as it continues to unfold.

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