

# Libraries, librarians, archives, museums and the COVID-19 pandemic

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The whole world woke up to the awareness of a word “COVID-19” in February 2020. Another word “pandemic” became attached to it because the new coronavirus that gave rise to this word, had stopped being an epidemic in China and had moved with frightening speed to the rest of the world. Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic! Since February 2020, a lot has happened to make the COVID-19 one that is shutting down the world as it was. How are librarians, archivists and curators responding to the pandemic? What is being done – to give information about the pandemic to the world, to document what is happening, to disseminate information on how to prevent contracting the virus, to give safety information during the pandemic season?

## Onset of pandemic

In the beginning, libraries and librarians were part of the confused masses and could not go beyond sending researched articles to online platforms, about the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts were made to ensure that library patrons had access to free resources, and quite a number of publishers decided to give free access to some of their collections that had hitherto needed subscriptions to gain access.

African Library & Information Associations & Institutions (AfLIA) came out with posters and guidelines: “As librarians, we owe it as a duty to make accessible all relevant information about this disease in all shapes and forms for the benefit and protection of our users and communities, without causing undue panic”.

Find more at [https://web.afia.net/corona-virus-covid-19-awareness-what-can-african-librarians-do/?utm\\_source=](https://web.afia.net/corona-virus-covid-19-awareness-what-can-african-librarians-do/?utm_source=)

[AfLIA Members](https://www.afLIA.org/Members&utm_campaign=a102b45b21-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_12_10_01_55_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c6108a149e-a102b45b21-257347345) on some useful resources (articles, infographics, etc.) that you can disseminate by sharing or projecting on screens or printing and pasting at vantage points at your library to educate your staff and user communities.

In addition, librarians can show exemplary preventative measures by:

- providing hand-washing facilities at entrance to the library;
- organizing demonstrations of how to properly wash hands from elbows down to the fingers, in-between fingers and under the nails; and
- providing disposable nose masks, if possible, to all library users or to those that cough, sneeze or have running nose in the reading rooms/halls.

Report on remote learning. See more at [www.chalkbeat.org/2020/3/3/21178677/amid-coronavirus-fears-the-cdc-told-schools-to-plan-for-remote-learning-that-s-harder-than-it-sounds](http://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/3/3/21178677/amid-coronavirus-fears-the-cdc-told-schools-to-plan-for-remote-learning-that-s-harder-than-it-sounds). Part of the report stated that: “plans for students to use libraries or community centers to connect to the internet would not work during a coronavirus outbreak since health officials say people should avoid public gathering places”.

What then is the response of libraries, librarians and allied information services to the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Responses to the pandemic

When the pandemic started, and useful information was being sent out by libraries and librarians, it became obvious that conferences and meetings had to be rapidly cancelled some even

36 h beforehand due to fears about its spread. An example was the March meeting of the American Physical Society which was to be held in Denver, CO. Virtual platforms had to be used to share their talks.

Major library conferences also suffered the same fate. Some were the LD4 Conference 2020 (Linked Data in Libraries 2020) which was to have been held from 13 to 14 March, 2020, and the IASSIST Conference themed “Data by Design: Building a Sustainable Data Culture”, which was to take place in Gothenburg, Sweden from 19 to 22 May, 2020. Conference organizers are hard hit because of the cancellations. Web Summit, a company that organizes Collision, a conference that was billed for June 21–24, 2020 had been forced to cancel and postpone to 2021, as well as shift the 2020 conference to “Collision from Home”. Collision, the “TIFF for tech”, the fastest growing tech conference has had to move online in response to COVID-19. The financial implication of the cancellations is a side-effect coming as huge debts by institutions particularly non-profits.

Partnerships amongst agencies and stakeholders have also emerged as responses to the pandemic. For instance, Coursera partnered with global health experts at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team to offer a new course on COVID-19. Given the importance of this topic FutureLearn, one of their learning platforms offers free and ongoing access to its content. Participants are slated to receive a free digital certificate upon successful completion and will be able to work through the course at a pace that suits them. To learn more about the effects of COVID-19 on: The global economy, the environment, and the sports industry, see [www.futurelearn.com/](http://www.futurelearn.com/)

[courses/covid19-novel-coronavirus?utm\\_campaign=fl\\_march\\_2020&utm\\_medium=futurelearn\\_organic\\_email&utm\\_source=newsletter\\_broadcast&utm\\_term=200311\\_ADH\\_COVID4&utm\\_content=course05\\_copy](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/covid19-novel-coronavirus?utm_campaign=fl_march_2020&utm_medium=futurelearn_organic_email&utm_source=newsletter_broadcast&utm_term=200311_ADH_COVID4&utm_content=course05_copy)

JOVE, the world's first and only peer-reviewed scientific video journal that increases productivity, is another establishment that has responded to the pandemic by proffering learning solutions. With many colleges and universities having to make the difficult decision to move to remote teaching and learning models because of the lockdown, JOVE is providing all of their Education video content free to use in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) teaching efforts through June 15th, 2020. JOVE also offers free access to extensive STEM education video library to aid remote teaching and learning at [www.jove.com/blog/educator-blog/jove-offers-free-access-to-extensive-stem-education-video-library-to-aid-remote-teaching-learning-as-covid-19-pandemic-shuts-down-classrooms-around-the-world/](http://www.jove.com/blog/educator-blog/jove-offers-free-access-to-extensive-stem-education-video-library-to-aid-remote-teaching-learning-as-covid-19-pandemic-shuts-down-classrooms-around-the-world/). In particular, to give education on coronavirus resources, see more at <https://www.jove.com/coronavirusresource>. It's trending!

Other types of responses are those by companies offering free use of their products just in case the crisis should hit

school communities. BrainPop, Kahoot!, PearDeck, Google and GoGuardian are among them. These tools will be used in the libraries of the schools, or channeled most likely through them. For tools compiled by commonsense.org, see more at [www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/best-student-collaboration-tools](http://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/best-student-collaboration-tools)

Rutgers University in New Jersey responded by providing online access to more than 12 million volumes previously only available in print through HathiTrust's Emergency Temporary Access Service, to the university community. Working with the HathiTrust, member libraries get temporary access to digital versions of print titles that would otherwise be inaccessible due to library closures. Rutgers users can search for the titles they need access to in QuickSearch or the HathiTrust Digital Library. The temporary status of the access is indicated in a note on the site. See more at [www.libraries.rutgers.edu/news/rutgers-hathitrust-partnership-adds-emergency-online-access-over-12-million-volumes](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/news/rutgers-hathitrust-partnership-adds-emergency-online-access-over-12-million-volumes)

Booklist by the ALA also responded by giving free online access to users which includes: "More than 25 years of recommended print and audiobook reviews, features, interviews, spotlights, and classroom connections; Booklist

and Book Links replica digital editions, which can be read on desktop or mobile devices; advanced search functionality; and Readers' advisory and collection development tools". See more at [www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2020/03/booklist-announces-free-online-access-all](http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2020/03/booklist-announces-free-online-access-all)

Public libraries in America have responded to COVID-19 by providing free webinar series which are available on demand for across the country. The Public Library Association (PLA) has the recordings which can be accessed, on topics related to COVID-19, digital equity, evaluation and so on. See more at [www.ala.org/pla/education/onlinelearning/webinars](http://www.ala.org/pla/education/onlinelearning/webinars)

Situation summaries on COVID-19 can be got at the Centres for Diseases Control and Prevention website found at <https://cdc.gov/>. Emerald Insight publishers has also responded by adding to the resources available. Find them at [www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/topics/coronavirus](http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/topics/coronavirus). It's trending!

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