

Library Space

A PLANNING RESOURCE FOR LIBRARIANS

Pandemic Considerations for Library Design

Within a short period of time, the coronavirus pandemic has prompted designers and engineers to rethink their approach to interior spaces, exterior spaces, and mechanical systems for public buildings. Many predict that the current situation may not be an isolated incident in our lifetime, meaning that buildings and spaces require the capability to shift rapidly to a mode that responds to the threat at hand, fostering the health and well-being of its occupants. What we know about COVID-19 is that it is primarily spread through airborne droplets and aerosols. Limiting proximity between individuals, wearing masks properly, washing hands frequently, and limiting the time of exposure to non-household members are all strategies that curb the spread. There are also strategies we can employ in our physical spaces to encourage and facilitate best practices.

Much of how a library building operates in a pandemic is reliant upon the age, configuration, and condition of the facility; every building and every community's needs and preferences are different. However, whatever service model is adopted must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and provide reasonable accommodation for all. In addition to being inclusive, the facility needs to also be functional in both interior spaces and the site itself.

Flexibility - Even More Essential

Page 16 of the original resource addresses the importance of flexibility in planning, and the pandemic has highlighted this need. Consider these points:

- Modular service desks can be reconfigured or moved to other areas of the building to act as an access point or a barrier
- Service desks should be designed to accommodate temporary, removable clear acrylic partitions - though their effectiveness is debated, it's an option that many prefer
- Mobile shelving can be reconfigured to facilitate distancing as required
- Two-person study tables are easier to reconfigure than traditional larger ones
- Increased storage should be planned for furniture when distance is needed and/or lingering discouraged
- Clear sightlines are critical to facilitate services while enabling distance between individuals and groups
- Intuitive wayfinding through colors, symbols, and signage reduces the need for close contact between patrons & staff
- Self-service can reduce close contact between staff and patrons
 - Self-check
 - Laptop lockers
 - After-hours pickup lockers
- Mobile technology allows physical distance
- Furniture choices should be easy to clean, with materials such as hospital-grade upholstery

Functional, Safe Interiors

Interior spaces often require reconfiguration for safety during a pandemic. Close attention to indoor air quality is also recommended.

- Denote unidirectional foot traffic patterns for entrances, exits, stairwells, and collection areas. Use floor markers and barriers as needed
- Add signage indicating capacity limits in spaces, including elevators
- Reconfigure mobile shelving to facilitate distancing as required
- Remove furniture and equipment to facilitate distancing and discourage lingering
- Assess and upgrade indoor air quality and HVAC:
 - Have your HVAC system assessed by a professional engineer
 - Flush the building two hours before and after occupancy
 - Properly install true MERV-13 (not MERV-13-A) or higher filters with no gaps
 - If the fans and ducts cannot handle MERV-13, or there is no mechanical ventilation, use standalone or fixed HEPA units
 - Mechanical (controlled) ventilation is more effective than natural (operable windows)

Enhanced Exterior Spaces

For the outdoor environment, protection from the elements is the paramount concern while providing access to materials through curbside pickup and/or pop-up collections.

- Use durable temporary shelters to protect staff and library materials if a permanent solution, such as a covered walkway/porch or awning, isn't possible
- Provide patio heaters for cooler days when staff is stationed outside
- Extend robust wi-fi and provide seating for use of library-owned or person mobile devices outside the building
- Add drive-up windows and/or drive-through book drops
- Provide outdoor lockers with codes for contactless pick-up service
- Open vestibules to the outside with folding storefront doors or other techniques, creating an indoor/outdoor connection
- Maximize the use of parking lots and other outdoor spaces around the library for services and programming