



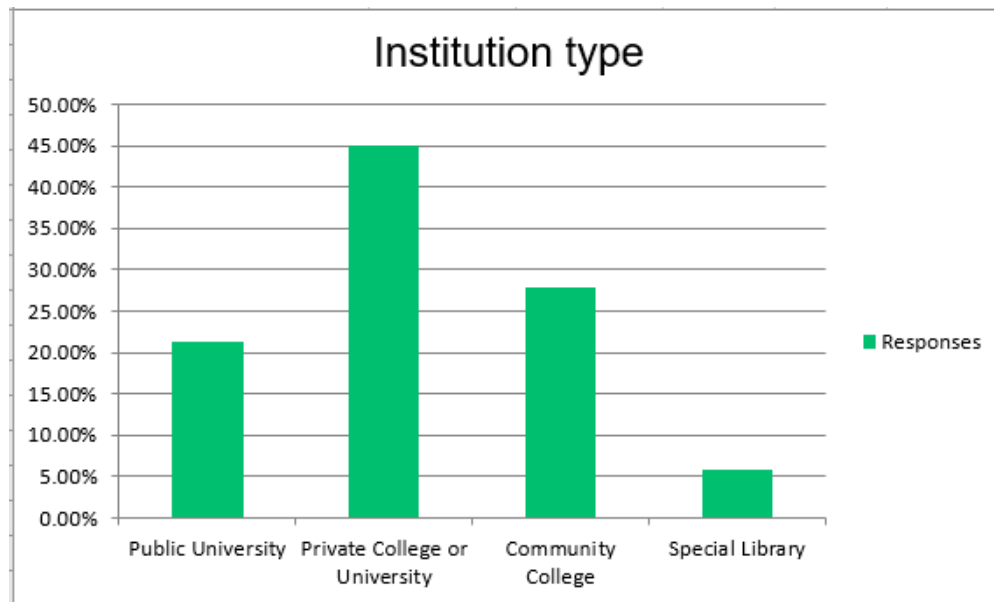
CARLI

Consortium of
Academic and Research
Libraries in Illinois

Illinois Library Transformations Survey Results

Approved by the CARLI Board of Directors, June 10, 2022

During March of 2022, CARLI member libraries were invited to share how their library has changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were asked to briefly identify up to 3 good changes at their library (ex. successful innovations they will do permanently), identify up to 3 difficult changes that their library made (reductions to budget, programming, staffing, space, etc.), and to optionally share any changes, good or bad, at their institution as a whole. Below are the results of 122 responses from 82 (67%) of the 127 CARLI member libraries. All library types contributed their experiences including public universities (21%, 26 responses), private colleges or universities (45%, 55 responses), community colleges (28%, 34 responses), and special libraries (6%, 7 responses).



Survey responses by institution type

Survey Question 1: Briefly identify up to 3 good changes at your library (ex. successful innovations you will do permanently)

CARLI-members reflected on the following positive transformations at their libraries that were implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each category represents responses from all library types (community colleges, public universities, private colleges or universities, community colleges, and special libraries).

1. Libraries increased their investment in electronic resources for library collections and prioritized electronic reserves over print (31 responses).

Increases to eBooks, eTextbooks, eJournals, audiobooks, streaming videos, patron driven acquisition packages, open access resources, and digitization efforts were reported. Libraries also indicated a prioritization of electronic reserves and reference collections over print and are shifting to electronic formats.

2. Libraries shifted to offering virtual reference, instruction, tours, programs, and displays (64 responses) or increased these virtual services when the pandemic first hit and continue to offer these services via live chat, video conferencing and recording software (Zoom, MS Teams, Screencast, Camtasia). Recordings were distributed across campus Learning Management Systems.

3. Offerings for circulation, interlibrary loan, reserving space, and equipment lending expanded (29 responses).

Circulation services responsively shifted online as a result of the pandemic with a new library mobile app with self-checkout implemented at one library, an online form created for requesting library cards, images of barcodes taken as proof an item is still in a patron's possession, and return receipts sent via email. Libraries offered broader scanning and digital delivery services and prioritized interlibrary loan book chapters as alternatives to entire book borrowing. Libraries added systems for reserving study rooms and tables.

Libraries also expanded offerings for contactless pickup, delivery, returns, and the lending of electronics. Contactless pickup options such as curbside, locker, and grab and go ILL, new book drops, and no-contact delivery services which were implemented at the start of the pandemic continue to be offered to patrons. Libraries also expanded their offerings of equipment lending of laptops, hot spots, headphones, portable chargers, and graphing calculators to support students.

4. Libraries implemented new systems and improved existing technologies and workflows (27 responses).

Several software and services implemented include Ex Libris's Alma and Primo VE, local requesting, Resource Recommender, Leganto; OpenAthens; Digital Deliver/CDL including OCLC Express; SpringShare LibGuides and LibAnswers; and SharePoint.

Existing technologies and workflows were improved including library websites, social media platforms, a second computer monitor added for reference services, wireless printers, a 3D printer, upgraded in-building technology to support hybrid programming, upgraded technology to support staff working from home, workflow improvements for streaming media acquisition and access, and task and project collaboration improvements with Kanban and Trello.

5. Library physical spaces were improved to become more inviting and accessible while also following COVID cleaning and safety protocols (24 responses).

Reported were a library space that was reevaluated to create a more welcoming environment, shelf heights were adjusted to become more accessible, new displays were created that were fun and highlighted themed collections at the library's entrance, study spaces for individuals and groups were added including new pods for quiet study, a relaxation room was added so students can get away from everything for 30 minutes, the "On the Road to Recovery" grant made possible the purchase of 6 private workstations that will be permanent fixtures, student PCs with cameras/mics were dedicated for online classes, conference rooms were upgraded, and a physical library was expanded.

Librarians ensured their physical spaces were as clean as possible for their patrons during the pandemic and continue this practice. Reported were enhanced cleaning and safety protocols including continuing to leave out sanitation stations in the library for patrons' use, continuing better cleaning practices in public spaces, stricter food policies, mask requirements during COVID outbreaks, and checking for vaccination.

6. For staff, library remote work policies became more flexible. Staff opportunities for skills building have increased awareness of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) and Open Educational Resources (OER)/textbook affordability (59 responses).

Libraries report allowing much more flexible work arrangements including increased flexibility for remote staff, hybrid schedules, and working hours. Staff learned new skills such as increasing their awareness of DEIA, learning about OER and textbook affordability, embracing assessment culture to demonstrate the library's value to the institution, cataloging, and increasing campus partnerships including an Art Museum that holds events in the library.

Survey Question 2: Briefly identify up to 3 difficult changes that your library made (reductions to budget, programming, staffing, space, etc.)

CARLI-members reflected on the following difficult changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each category represents responses from all library types (community colleges, public universities, private colleges or universities, and special libraries).

1. Reductions to library budgets significantly impacted library operations (54 responses).

Impacts on library operations due to budget reductions included reductions to staffing, hours, collections budgets for electronic resources (eBooks, databases, patron driven acquisitions packages), and the continued erosion of physical book budgets. Some libraries noted severe cuts across the university due to enrollment changes. The increased expense of purchasing more electronic resources was noted as also impacting the budget. Other difficulties included

delayed maintenance and renovations on buildings and reductions in programming and professional development.

2. Staffing losses and unfilled positions were reported as well as low staff morale.

Layoffs, furloughs, and delayed rehires were reported by 56% of respondents representing all library types (67 responses). Significant layoffs occurred at several libraries including a loss of all staff but one librarian, as well as losses of 50% or more staff. Reported were delayed rehiring of the library director as well as the delayed hiring for unfilled positions and after retirements. Losses of positions at all levels including student staffing were reported. One library indicated a mass exodus of staff after the pandemic started to lift.

25 responses expressed low staff morale. Many staff indicated being overworked due to taking on additional roles with fewer library personnel. Reported were difficulties staffing up to appropriate levels. COVID illnesses and quarantines cause temporary staffing shortages. Furloughed staff's morale was reported to be permanently damaged even after being reinstated. Team dynamics suffered. Several libraries reported difficulty coordinating efforts and strategic priorities with changes in leadership or no director. Staff felt isolated/missed each other and experienced a loss of work/home space separation. Staff turnover was reported.

3. Reductions to physical library hours, access to spaces, patron head counts, and patron interactions (53 responses)

Some reductions to hours were due to budget cuts and reduced staffing. Some physical libraries closed for prolonged periods including one library whose physical space closed for 18 months, another closed over the Summer of 2020, and one reported closing on Fridays. Libraries are still trying to get back to pre-pandemic hours including overnights and weekends. A concern was expressed that faculty and students no longer see the library as essential since it was shut down during COVID closings. A similar concern mentioned that users are now unaccustomed to being in the building.

Policies affecting access to spaces, social distancing, masking, and item quarantines were reported to reduce the use of the library space, circulation, and reference interactions. Access was reduced to only current students, faculty, and staff, excluding visitors and alumni at some institutions. Libraries reported closing stacks to browsing and supported social distancing recommendations by limiting the number of patrons able to utilize computer labs by 50% and the number of patrons able to utilize group study spaces. Mask requirements were reported as resulting in fewer students utilizing the library. The trend of fewer individuals coming into the library and interacting with staff currently continues as restrictions ease.

4. Library spaces were repurposed or reduced (32 responses)

Libraries experienced losses and reductions to their physical spaces, some temporary and some permanent. These losses included stacks space lost in a remodel, a level of a library closed, and spaces repurposed for other campus needs. A library classroom was repurposed for an adjunct

faculty lounge, and campus COVID testing needs caused a library computer lab to be repurposed. Other space changes were made to accommodate social distancing.

5. Library services were reduced (32 responses)

Some reductions to library services and programs were temporary during COVID spikes, others were cut for 2 years. Traditional programming, special events, and exhibits were stopped or limited for patrons and staff. Reduced budgets, staffing, and foot traffic were reported as reasons for the reductions in programming.

Survey Question 3: If you'd like to, please share any changes, good or bad, at your institution as a whole.

Included are a small selection of quotes and summaries from the many comments shared about institutional changes.

- Institutions vary in whether or not they continue to be flexible with remote work arrangements. Many continue to be flexible, but one that went back to a zero remote work policy indicates staff retention has proven challenging.
- Library budget is at the forefront of many institutions' minds. "While we've shored up our online offerings, the physical library still hasn't rebounded from the pandemic. Attendance and usage of the space is down and we haven't fully reinstated all of our policies and services for groups." One library reflects this low in-person usage is part of the justification for administration reallocating library space. Another is concerned their robust virtual programming attendance isn't being acknowledged by the administration which is solely focused on bodies in the building. Libraries are concerned that enrollment numbers are still less than the pre-pandemic counts and some are facing known cuts. One library reports "the pandemic forced us to adapt and get creative with how we deliver services, particularly in the face of 30% budget cuts.
- Several libraries are in the process of getting space makeovers with varying degrees of involvement in the discussion of what they really need.
- One institution "now offers 6 different class styles to accommodate student needs." Student support services have increased and are focused on educational success. Their campus Wellness Center is staffed with a social worker once a week.
- This final quote is from an I-Share library reflecting on the migration to Alma / Primo VE: "It was an amazing endeavor to successfully bring up an entirely new library system in the middle of a pandemic without in person training and to be able to work interdepartmentally

across "modules". Sharing, trial and error, testing, cleanup-- there was something for everyone. PIVOT seems like our mantra."

In reflection, CARLI-member libraries faced and continue to face very difficult situations as a result of the COVID pandemic including reductions to library budgets, staffing losses and unfilled positions, low morale, temporary reductions in access to the physical library, repurposing of library spaces, and reduced library services. In spite of all of these challenges, libraries demonstrated their resilience and ingenuity in steadfastly serving students, faculty, and staff at their institutions by prioritizing their investment in electronic resources, quickly pivoting to offer their services virtually, circulating materials in new and safe ways including offering laptops and hotspots as courses moved online, and continuing to improve their services through implementing new systems, advancing existing technologies, and improving their physical spaces. Libraries additionally supported their staff by offering more flexible work policies and providing opportunities for skills building that resulted in an increased awareness of Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility and Open Educational Resources. Through the challenges of the COVID pandemic, CARLI-member libraries transformed to become even better. In the face of budget cuts in the coming year, we hope Illinois institutions recognize the importance of their libraries in fulfilling their missions.