



Arkansas Libraries and COVID-19: A message from the President

These are trying times. For everyone. Including libraries. Our mission statements may vary, but condensed down, they advocate service to our communities. Libraries have long maintained traditional services utilizing face-to-face methods. As technology has developed, these same libraries have expanded their services accordingly. Now, more than ever, it is vital that we work together and coordinate efforts to prioritize the health and safety of everyone.

We recognize the importance of keeping our communities in touch with the tools and support they need to seek knowledge and resources from a distance. Therefore, in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations and in consideration of the governor's recent directives and initiatives to limit the spread of the virus, the Arkansas Library Association (ArLA), as an advocate and leader of libraries in the state, encourages all public, academic, and special libraries to close their doors and re-open only when guidance from public health officials indicates the risk from COVID-19 has significantly subsided. While library buildings are not conducive to social distancing and disinfecting to the degree needed to curb the spread of the virus is not feasible at this time, libraries and their workers can continue to be beacons of knowledge and hope. Libraries remain relevant in changing times when they adapt to the needs of their communities. Additionally, it is during challenges that ideas flourish, innovation happens, and change accelerates. Arkansas libraries embrace this opportunity to engage with their communities in new ways, develop innovative services, share electronic resources, promote social engagement via distance, and collaborate with partners and advocates to continue meeting their

mission: to serve. By closing the physical doors and focusing on alternative methods of service, libraries are saving lives. In addition to online resources, Arkansas libraries have already implemented innovative approaches to services, such as curbside pickup, online card registrations, online book clubs, live storytelling events, and more. The Arkansas Library Association commends and supports our Arkansas libraries for their tough decisions to close and for their continued dedication and service to their communities.

Additionally, ArLA encourages our colleagues, library administrators, boards of trustees, and educational institutions to support their workers and ensure their safety and wellbeing. In that vein, and in agreement with the American Library Association's Allied Professional Association, we also encourage library officials and institutions to ensure all library workers receive full pay and benefits while libraries are closed. Our staff members are our most valuable resource. Let us all take this opportunity to demonstrate our support for libraries and library workers.

Stay safe, healthy, and whole.

Crystal Gates
ArLA President