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**ULC Press Contact**

Curtis Rogers

(202) 750-8658

[crogers@urbanlibraries.org](mailto:crogers@urbanlibraries.org)

## **Public Libraries Innovate to Serve Vulnerable Populations on the Front Lines of COVID-19**

*North America's public libraries are pivoting during the COVID-19 crisis to help ensure all community members can access information, health services and critical relief supplies.*

WASHINGTON – Public libraries across the U.S. and Canada are taking bold and innovative measures to mitigate the inequitable impact of COVID-19 on children, low-income families, communities of color, people experiencing homelessness and other high-risk populations. Through dynamic partnerships with local government, new digital service models, reimagined library spaces and other innovative approaches, these new efforts reflect a rapid evolution of the public library's essential role in the era of COVID-19.

"Public libraries are first responders in the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. As COVID-19 magnifies the systemic gaps between the haves and have nots in our societies, libraries are bravely stepping up – and into new frontiers – in order to fulfill their core function of ensuring equitable access to information and services," said ULC President & CEO Susan Benton.

North America's public libraries are forging partnerships, standing up innovative services, redeploying staff and reimagining library facilities to:

- **Collect, create and distribute personal protective equipment.** San José Public Library staff and volunteers have used the library's 3-D printers to create hundreds of face shields and masks for donation to organizations in need. On April 24, 2020, San José Mayor Sam Liccardo and City Librarian Jill Bourne joined library team members at Good Samaritan Hospital to donate nearly 300 face shields and masks.
- **Combat food insecurity.** Toronto Public Library (Ont.) has transformed 12 library branches into alternate service locations for city food banks. Library team members

supervise and work to package food at these sites, which have served more than 8,100 households and 21,800 individuals.

- **Provide equitable access to emergency supplies.** Richland Library (S.C) has worked with Richland School District One to distribute 200 first aid kits to parents at meal distribution sites. This work was made possible by an Aflac grant to the library's Safety and Security Department to distribute first aid kits to community families through Summer 2020.
- **Offer free COVID-19 testing.** Kansas City Public Library (Mo.) has partnered with Swope Health to offer free virus testing at library branches. In May, the team was able to test 223 individuals for the coronavirus free of charge.
- **Trace the spread of COVID-19.** San Francisco Public Library (Calif.) team members have joined nearly 100 city employees who are placing calls to San Franciscans to [help track](#) and contain the spread of the virus.
- **Provide shelter and supplies to individuals experiencing homelessness.** LA County Library (Calif.) has partnered with the United Way of Greater Los Angeles to provide library access and activity kits to homeless individuals who are being housed in city hotels through the [Project Roomkey](#) initiative.

North America's public libraries are also reaching patrons in new ways via robust digital programming, partnerships with school systems to support distance learning, dial-in hotlines for small business and entrepreneurs, "library at home" web portals, and much more. Many libraries are now offering access to library materials and expert staff through curbside and drive-thru services, limited building access for computer use and delivery outreach to communities in need.

For more information about the leadership of North America's public libraries on the front line of COVID-19 recovery efforts, visit [urbanlibraries.org](https://urbanlibraries.org).

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### **About the Urban Libraries Council**

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems. ULC drives cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions for the 21st-century. Over 150 member libraries in the U.S. and Canada rely on ULC to identify significant challenges facing today's communities and provide new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, digital inclusion, workforce and economic development, and race and social equity.