FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 17, 2020

ULC Press Contact
Curtis Rogers
(202) 750-8658
crogers@urbanlibraries.org

Statement on the Need for Public Library Closures During the Coronavirus Pandemic

The Urban Libraries Council urges libraries, government officials and the public to recognize the vital importance of library closures to slowing the spread of COVID-19.

WASHINGTON – The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak continues to escalate globally, representing a serious public health threat for communities of all sizes. The World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other leading health experts have advised that social distancing is essential for saving lives and stemming the growth of this pandemic. As central gathering spaces, public library facilities have the potential to powerfully catalyze the spread of this disease. It is vital that communities and their leaders recognize the serious dangers of libraries remaining open, and to support their systems in closing facilities.

In the U.S. alone, more than 1,000 public library systems have closed the doors to their facilities, according to research coordinated by Do Space Director of Technology Michael Sauers and Technology & Innovation in Education Learning Specialist Julie Erickson. These libraries include nearly 140 Urban Libraries Council member systems, who serve many of the largest cities, counties and provinces in North America. While public libraries are closing their facilities to the public at this unprecedented rate, some library systems are facing pressure from government officials and community members to remain open (or re-open) during the COVID-19 outbreak.

As reported by a 2019 Gallup poll, citizens visit libraries more often than they attend sporting events or go to movie theaters. As governors and local officials such as mayors and county executives ask schools, restaurants, sports facilities, movie theaters and museums to close, libraries must also temporarily shut their doors to respond to the global pandemic.

In addition to physical spaces, items circulated by libraries may accelerate the spread of the coronavirus, even with heightened sanitation measures in place. There is no reliable data available on how long the virus can remain alive on the surfaces of books, DVDs and other materials circulated by the library. Library closures are crucial to manage the risk related to the circulation of these materials.

ULC President & CEO Susan Benton issued the following statement regarding the importance of library closures during the COVID-19 outbreak:

"Closing facilities is not an easy decision for any public library. Libraries are proud to be the public's most trusted institution, known for providing safe spaces. In upholding that role, libraries have kept their doors open through riots, natural disasters and other cases of extreme community need. However, the extraordinary circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic have created a unique situation and libraries' best response is to help people of all ages engage in distance learning online, using e-books, audiobooks, web databases, streaming services and other digital media. In the weeks ahead, public libraries look forward to partnering with key institutions, including public schools, the Small Business Administration, local public housing authorities and others to help families, children and individuals carry on with their lives remotely."

Information about library closures and other responses to the COVID-19 outbreak can be found at urbanlibraries.org.

###

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. More than 150 urban 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.