

2020 Pandemic & SCLS Libraries Review

[COVID Pandemic Timeline](#) (Wisconsin Department of Health Services website)

January 30, 2020: The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

February 5, 2020: The Wisconsin Department of Health Services announced the state's first person with coronavirus. The person was tested for coronavirus and sent home to isolate. City and county leaders said the risk of the general public contracting the virus remained low.

March 10, 2020: Public Health Madison and Dane County announced a second case of the coronavirus in Dane County. Public Health recommended postponing or canceling all non-essential international travel to level 2 and level 3 countries and domestic travel to states with more than 10 cases.

March 12, 2020: Gov. Evers declared a public health emergency to direct all resources needed to respond to and contain COVID-19 in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services recommended postponing or canceling gatherings with more than 250 people.

March 13, 2020: President Donald Trump proclaimed COVID-19 as a national emergency.

March 17, 2020: Gov. Evers closed all schools indefinitely. Public Health recommended staying home as much as possible.

March 25, 2020: Gov. Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services issued the "Safer At Home" order, ordering all individuals to stay at home, non-essential businesses and operations to cease and prohibiting non-essential travel.

April 16, 2020: Gov. Evers extended the "Safer At Home" order.

May 13, 2020: The Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down Gov. Evers' "Safer At Home" order.

July 30, 2020: Gov. Evers issued Executive Order 82 to proclaim that a public health emergency exists for Wisconsin.

October 8, 2020: Gov. Evers issued a new order limiting gatherings.

December 11, 2020: The FDA issued emergency use authorization for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine.

December 14, 2020: UW Health and SSM Health received the first shipments of the COVID-19 vaccines and immediately started vaccinating employees.

December 18, 2020: FDA issued emergency use authorization for Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

February 3, 2021: Gov. Evers issued Emergency Order 1 requiring masks, social distancing and enclosed space rules until March 20, 2021.

Impacts on member libraries

During the time when libraries were shut down and operating with fewer hours, they seized on the opportunity to work on long delayed projects like relabeling materials, RFID tagging, weeding, reviewing collections, digitization, and creating new web sites.

On a larger scale building renovations were popular. There were 8 renovations along with new buildings. Member libraries created teen areas, added a playground, patio furniture, and updated technology equipment, including Wi-Fi access, to better serve their customers.

The new equipment increased the technology skills of both staff and library board members. Staff were able to participate in new training in many areas virtually. Staff could attend conferences virtually. The training offered across the state and systems was a well spring containing the opportunity to learn new skills without the cost of travel or loss of work time at the library. The last 12 months also derailed the typical face to face meetings which fostered a demand for more ways to check in with each other. Youth Services staff, system directors, library directors and others set up regular virtual check-ins resulting in more time together than in pre-pandemic months.

This new training and beefed up technology enabled libraries to offer programming in new ways and reach folks beyond their building and zip code. 89% of the libraries offered virtual programming. Story times were held via Facebook and Zoom. Story walks were created and locally supported by community and business groups. Lecture series and book groups were offered virtually. Virtual programming really came to life in the summer and fall with libraries doing nearly 11,700 programs with 472,285 participants.

The desire for books and reading materials stayed strong through the year and libraries responded by providing curbside pick-up. Patrons became more comfortable placing and managing holds due to the pandemic. Twenty libraries mentioned the curbside service in their annual visit as a success. All but one member offered the service. Many commented that they will probably continue the service after the initial pandemic need has passed.

A preliminary report indicated the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium digital collection usage increased on every metric: checkouts, new and unique users, as well as holds. There was a 113% increase in monthly new users. Most of the metrics remain elevated over time indicating a lasting impact even as restrictions loosen. Most new users (66%) indicated the COVID-19 pandemic was a factor in their decision to sign up for and access the WPLC collection. The majority of new users indicated they heard about the collection either from library staff or through word of mouth. The pandemic factor resulted in OverDrive and Advantage having huge increases with limited marketing.

A major impact of 2020 was that an additional 11 SCLS member libraries went fine free during the pandemic, July 2020 – Jan 2021. This means a total of 33 or 60% of SCLS libraries are now fine free.

A common statement in the 2020 library visits was that library directors found staff to be inventive, flexible, adaptable and resilient. I would echo that statement for SCLS staff also.

County funding

The trend of funding in regard to adjacent county reimbursements is not as terrible as originally feared. The change from 2020 for 2022 reimbursements is a decrease in the overall total of 0.54% (1/2 of one percent). The reimbursements are based on data from 2 years prior (2020 data for 2022). This does not mean all individual libraries remain unscathed but reflects the total from the 5 SCLS counties that apply for county reimbursements.

County reimbursements varied more county by county and library by library. Columbia County as a whole saw an increase of \$28,293 with all libraries gaining except Rio who decreased by over \$8,000. The same for Green County with Monticello being the lone member taking a loss of \$16,818 from the previous year. Sauk County libraries saw an overall decrease of \$4,532 with a mix of increases and decreases. Wood County overall saw a decrease of over \$111,000 with all of its libraries seeing a decrease. The factors impacting these numbers cannot all be attributed to the pandemic. In smaller libraries, it could be that one power user moved away or a remodeling project reduced accessibility. Of course, being open less hours in the pandemic would affect usage and residents did not travel as much during the shut downs but again the feared cataclysmic drop did not appear. I have included a description of the funding calculation process below.

Chapter 43 is the starting point as it requires each county to reimburse public libraries for serving county residents who do not directly pay to support a public library in that county. Those are considered non-residents without a library. For an example, a resident of Reedsburg, Baraboo, or any other municipality with a library would not be included, just those people that live outside communities with a library.

At the end of each year, SCLS determines how many of those circulations each library had that year. It divides the library's total expenditures (minus any federal funds) by the total circulation to calculate a cost per circulation. Then SCLS multiplies this amount by the number of circulations to home county residents without a library. State law requires that counties reimburse libraries for 70% of that cost. However, some counties like Sauk, choose to reimburse at a higher rate. In addition to this, some counties also provide other funding for technology or other uses.

Adjacent county circulation is calculated the same way, but libraries are only able to request payment from a county adjacent to the library's home county. State law also requires that adjacent counties reimburse eligible libraries at 70% of their actual circulation times the cost of circulation.

Impacts on SCLS

Following the Governor's order, SCLS headquarters staff shifted to working 100% from home. Delivery was closed March 17 until May 3; other system delivery services across the state were also shuttered. Headquarters and Delivery staff began meeting virtually on Mondays via Blue Jeans. SCLS spent over \$5,000 to purchase staff PPEs and COVID related cleaning materials. Delivery spent nearly \$15,000 to purchase 1,200 extra red bins to allow for storage during the extended quarantine times. They spent \$2,188 for carts and \$3,280 to widen the garage door and purchase a pallet jack to move the stored materials from the garage to the loading dock.

On behalf of its member libraries, SCLS submitted and received a Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) grant of \$62, 142 for supplies and services. SCLS also applied for numerous other grants to support its members and their customers.

The Wisconsin Library Association (WLA), a tenant of SCLS, also began working virtually in March. In May SCLS agreed to lower their rent in light of the pandemic. WLA reconfigured their organization with staff layoffs and transitioned to a 100% virtual environment permanently. WLA has a lease agreement with SCLS until May 2023. They are working to find a sub-lessee for the remainder of the lease's term.

As a result of the pandemic, SCLS will be incorporating lessons learned and revising procedures and policies e.g. working remotely, communication options, facilities, sick leave, and materials handling.