

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE REPORT – MARCH 2020

Since March 3rd, when the first case of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was confirmed in Westchester County, a flurry of activity took place as WLS and member library staff tried to determine how to best serve the library community while protecting the health of all. As quickly as the number of confirmed cases grew, service plans changed daily. WLS worked closely with the Public Library Directors Association (PLDA) to help determine service changes that could be implemented. Initially, library closures, established for short periods to sanitize locations, grew to the full closure of all libraries as well as the WLS offices by March 17th. Concerns grew about the spread of the disease, how payment of staff should be handled, and what benefits are available during the closure period. Reports from the Federal, State and local levels were often confusing as different information was being disseminated. It took a great deal of time and effort to analyze, coordinate and put in place procedures to deal with this pandemic. I want to thank everyone for their extraordinary responsiveness during this difficult, unprecedented time. Below is a recap of WLS activities in relation to COVID-19.

Budget Update

The 2020 Westchester County contract for \$1,030,000 is in the process of being finalized. That's the good news. The status of the 2020-2021 budget allocation from New York State is less certain. The [New York Library Association \(NYLA\)](#), the organization that leads the statewide advocacy efforts for increasing library funding in the State budget provided an update on March 27th that noted: "COVID-19 has upended the traditional process that we have become familiar with and instead replaced it with uncertainty."

What we do know is that the Governor, the Senate and the Assembly have been in negotiations and are striving to have a budget in place by April 1st. Funding proposals that had been in place prior to the pandemic have been set aside as the newest and most important priority is to protect the health of every New Yorker during this crisis. Once the budget is passed and the level of library funding is determined, I will work with the Public Library Directors Association (PLDA), the WLS staff and the WLS Board to coordinate our next steps.

Cataloging Services

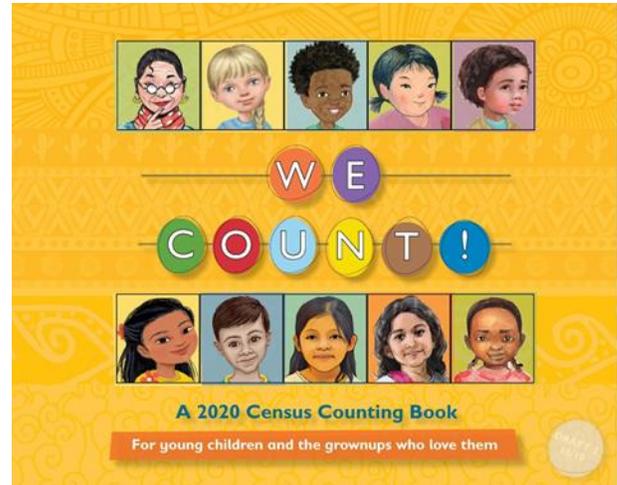
The catalogers are being challenged by the drop off in requests. Two weeks ago, 59 email messages were received -- to request bib records, report issues, ask for advice, etc. -- and as of March 24, there were zero. Two weeks ago, 1,692 MARC records from vendors were handled, and as of March 24, it was down to 92. The brief vendor MARC records which the Cataloging Services Department overlays with full records totaled 161 two weeks ago, and last week they totaled 45. It will be important to understand what the libraries are currently doing, and WLS will need to explore a way to determine how and what the libraries are doing regarding acquisitions.

The Cataloging Services team is currently working remotely on backlog lists of brief titles to overlay. One main challenge will be how to address the influx of requests once regular library services are restored.

Census 2020

During February and early March, Dana Hysell-Alongi and Joe Maurantonio distributed large quantities of 2020 Census flyers, posters, stickers and bookmarks to the member libraries. During that time, additional materials were supplied upon request.

A unique book for children titled, *WE COUNT: A 2020 Census Counting Book*, was distributed in packages of 25, 50 or 100 to many libraries locations and were well received. These books were also given to several different WLS departments and non-profit organizations to share them throughout the Westchester Community. WestchesterCounts.org website has continued to grow with relevant and timely information regarding the 2020 Census. A variety of related videos, targeted flyers, images and data packets were added to support library staff and patrons.



Ms. Hysell-Alongi visited all of the member libraries to review locations and offer guidance in potential marketing, connecting with community and library staff. Additionally, numerous WLS 2020 Census workshops were offered at WLS and at member libraries in support of our complete count efforts. As the 2020 Census went live on March 12th, Ms. Hysell-Alongi and Mr. Maurantonio were able to distribute kiosks with a mouse, security locks, privacy screens, census reference binder, supplementary stickers, bookmarks, and *WE COUNT!* books to more than a third of the member libraries. Initially, these items were to be transported to the libraries; but due to the coronavirus, WLS created a controlled, sterile area where library staff could come to WLS to pick up the items. Access to the room was limited to one individual at a time, a brief introduction to the 2020 Kiosk was held and then the room was wiped down to maintain a sterile environment.

Most of our planned 2020 Census library programs and outreach events were severely impacted due to COVID-19. Since the closure of the member libraries and the WLS offices, Ms. Hysell-Alongi personally connected with a library team to help create a one-page 2020 Census quick fact flyer; and with the majority of other libraries on Facebook and/or Instagram, reminders were continued to be posted of our ongoing Census support.

Lastly, Ms. Hysell-Alongi has scheduled two Zoom "Census Chat & Connect" sessions on Monday, March 30th, at 2 pm and on Wednesday, April 1st, at 11 am. These will focus on 2020 updates from the Census Bureau, find out how the libraries are dealing with the Census, and answer questions and concerns. All member libraries are being encouraged to do a story-time reading on Census day of the *WE COUNT!* book on the online platform of their choice.

County, State and Federal Executive Orders and Legislation

The decisions for when to re-open the member libraries and WLS for normal operations will be guided by the County, State and Federal authorities' recommendations concerning social distancing. At this point, it is anticipated that the earliest open date would be May 1, 2020; but WLS staff are making preparations for an earlier start date should that occur.

Interpretations of how Governor Cuomo's Executive Orders affect a member library, especially in terms of staffing and available benefits, are largely influenced by a library's governance structure, policies, union contracts, participation in civil service, local municipality guidelines, etc.

Two resources that have been especially helpful during this time of continuously changing guidelines have been [Nonprofit Westchester's \(NPW\)](#) new legislation updates and virtual learning opportunities as well as the [Ask the Lawyer](#) service hosted by the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC) that provides a listing of recently asked questions. Not surprisingly, many of the more recent questions have been focused on Governor Cuomo's Executive Orders and their potential impact on public library operations.

NPW's updates and learning opportunities and WNYLRC's Ask the Lawyer website are available for member library staff and directors to access. As a reminder, through the WLS membership to NPW, every member library is also a full member of NPW.

Development

The date of the Celebrating Westchester Libraries Breakfast has been changed to Wednesday, November 18, from 8:30-10:30 am at the Doubletree Hilton Tarrytown, and the WLS Annual Meeting will be incorporated into the event. Please save the date on your calendar.

Facility Operations

Despite everything, plans for the installation of a new phone system for WLS went ahead on March 15th. The new system is up and running, and the following changes have been made to accommodate the current environment:

- Several staff requested and received call forwarding to external phones.
- Special service lines (like IT Helpdesk, 231-3264/HSE Connect) have been reconfigured to provide a more, direct access to staff.
- Additional staff now receiving voicemail notification via email.
- Equipment for more remote access to phone service arrived at the office, to be collected for configuration to support more remote work if needed.
- The system can be remotely administered and is monitored and maintained regularly by both manual and automatic processes.

This new system will have a positive impact for libraries with continued access to WLS staff and services despite the move to more asynchronous voice communications.

The 570 Taxter building remains open because there are tenants that provide "essential services." However, the hours that the building remains open were curtailed and all doors to the WLS office space were activated to remain locked. Any access to the WLS office space will be monitored closely to abide to social distancing limitations.

Working remotely for some of the day-to-day financial operations is challenging. Fortunately, a number of things can be done remotely such as the payroll for which sufficient funds were transferred through the May 12th payroll. Entries for preparation of monthly financials and payment vouchers can also be done remotely. However, deposits, printing and signing of checks still must be done manually.

The financial audit is completed from the WLS perspective; now it is in the hands of the auditors to finish and send the draft reports. The requested information has been compiled in order for the auditors to prepare the 990 Form. This will be reviewed by Fran Feuerman, WLS Chief Financial Officer, and then sent on to the auditors.

Information Technology (IT) Services

The IT Department has been working extensively to help libraries and patrons. There have been approximately 300 work orders closed in less than two weeks. Vendors have been contacted to see what resources can be provided to both libraries and patrons.

The IT staff has been focused on helping WLS and the member libraries to smoothly transition from organizations that worked primarily from a physical site with some digital activities to ones that must now function in a purely digital world. This transition needed to happen quickly and during a time when there was inconsistent messaging from our State and Federal authorities. WLS and the member libraries are doing a good job of navigating in this new work environment and have been focusing their efforts on creating new virtual services, accessing new or expanding existing digital resources and building a sense of community so that individuals feel connected and informed.

A number of online catalog related activities were accomplished to help libraries and patrons deal with the COVID-19 closures:

- Library card expirations have been extended to May 1, 2020.
- Active Directory password resets were changed from every 90 days to 120 days to assist staff who may not log in until the near future.
- All collection agency services for overdue fines have been disabled until further notice.
- PIN reset requests from the help desk are being processed.

In response to the large influx of virtual training opportunities offered by many vendors and service providers, and the growing requests for information about training opportunities being asked by member library staff, Senior Technology Trainer Allison Midgely created a new [Learning Opportunities page](#) on the IT Wiki to help match up new trainings being offered with the requests for training opportunities. The resources provided can help library staff to engage in virtual interactions with patrons and help expand a staff member's existing knowledge base. Some resources include activities that can be shared with patrons who want to engage themselves or help provide structure for their children. Member library staff who discover a new learning opportunity are able to complete an online form on the page so that it can be shared with other member libraries who visit the Learning Opportunities page. WLS trainers are working to support the member libraries on their journeys in this virtual world and are developing both live and on-demand training specific to Westchester and the resources and services offered county-wide by WLS and the member libraries. .

E-resources have been expanded as noted below. WLS is exploring other options to provide even more content and services.

- **Tutor.com** has expanded their online tutoring hours and is now available from 9 AM-10 PM, Monday to Friday. Originally the hours started after school, from 3 PM-10 PM.
- **Hoopla** users can now download up to 10 items per month, up from the original 5 items per month. In addition, a Hoopla Bonus Borrows collection of 1,100 titles has been created to provide free downloads to users at no additional cost to WLS or the member libraries.
- **Kanopy** users can now download up to 20 films per month, up from the original 10 films per month. Kanopy has also provided free access to many children's and classic film titles.
- **OverDrive** collections are being expanded by many of the member libraries and WLS. The Mount Pleasant Public Library's board has authorized \$100,000 of additional content to their library's Overdrive Advantage account. These newly acquired materials are available for all active cardholders throughout the systems. Many of the member libraries are now dedicating a large portion of their current book budgets to digital content. WLS has also been purchasing access to additional audiobook and ebook titles on OverDrive to meet the higher demand for content on this platform.

The three IT audits (operations, network and VDI) are still underway. The current situation has slowed down the process of each audit, but there is still forward motion with an expectation of being able to share results with the WLS Board and PLDA by late April/early May. In consultation with CompuFit, the firm maintaining the WLS network, the auditing firms and hardware vendors, Mr. Arana has identified new hardware (to be funded through the approved 2020 Capital Budget line for network services approved at the October 2019 board meeting) that will provide stronger intrusion detection to help prevent future malware/ransomware attacks and will expand options for remote desktop access to all of the member libraries.

Interlibrary Loan (ILL)

The ILL service is severely impacted by the closing of WLS member libraries as well as external institutions (academic and public libraries) throughout the State due to COVID-19. The closings forced a full stop on all loaning to and borrowing from external institutions. The impacts of this include:

- Additional loss of access beyond local library collections.
- Communication challenges:
 - The ILS and ILLiad (the software used for the ILL service) do not speak directly. Therefore, patrons are not fully informed about their interlibrary loans, including any extensions that have been granted.
 - In our current structure, the member libraries serve as the direct contact with the patron who has requested materials from outside of the WLS member libraries. To convey updates on materials that have been requested, WLS ILL staff will need to coordinate with member library staff to provide updates to the patron about the status of current and pending loans.
 - Fines and fees for overdue items seem to be flexible as external institutions are also coping with closings and service interruptions. WLS ILL staff will follow up with lending institutions to have any potential fines and fees eliminated or reduced.

In summary, ILL services will need time to achieve full functioning as the restoration of services will need to be done in stages in order to keep workloads manageable for staff at both WLS and at the member libraries.

Open Meetings Law

For member library boards and directors, one of the biggest changes to their normal functioning concerns the new guidelines for adhering to Open Meetings Law (OML) when holding a virtual meeting. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the assumption within OML was that there would always be a physical location or locations where a member of the public could go to view board members as they conducted business during the meeting. With the current restrictions against public gatherings, there would not be any physical locations for the members of the public to access.

Below are key highlights of the new guidelines:

The Order says: "...authorizing such meetings to be held remotely by conference call or similar service provided that the public has the ability to view or listen to such proceeding and that such meetings are recorded and later transcribed."

"...with regard to notice, which is at the heart of the member's question, the Order has waived none of law's requirements."

"And the method you select for sharing the meeting in real time (livestreaming, a broadcast) should be accessible to the general public."

The general recommendation is that during this pandemic a board should only schedule a meeting if there are immediate actions needed to keep the library operational and the meeting's agenda should be limited to these essential issues.

Public Innovation & Engagement (PIE)

A significant part of PIE's work involves content creation and response to individual questions about access to services. To that end, department staff has been actively maintaining and updating web content and responding to Helpline inquiries (website chat, email and by phone). A number of planned programs (Learning Resources training, Breath-Body-Mind) are migrating online.

Key activities and plans include:

- Updating website content and design (and expanding our knowledge of design tools as we go along, e.g., Wordpress, Elementor, etc.). Priority has been given to FirstFind, Community Conversations, Youth Services wiki, Senior Law Day.
- Created [COVID-19 Resource page](#) on SBIC wiki, linked by WLS and Westchester Connections.
- In response to member library renewed interest in online professional development opportunities, enrollment was encouraged in the three-hour program on Niche Academy, "Empathy Driven Problem Solving" (Homeless Training Institute program, subscription available through May 31st).
- Coordination with member libraries to conduct online staff/public programs: White Plains (Cybersecurity, 3/30; Breath-Body-Mind (BBM), 4/15), John C. Hart/Yorktown (BBM, schedule TBD). In support of the Resilience Coalition, planning underway for transition of monthly BBM Interest Group meeting to online.
- Providing small group webinars to Read Better tutors to review online resources that can be tapped to for remote instruction, e.g., Learning Upgrade.
- Creation of public webinars and video recordings for the Senior Law Day website. Four webinars are currently scheduled for April.
- Working with members of the Senior Law Day team on the annual update of the Elder Law Q&A; migrating the entire document from Quark to InDesign.
- Westchester Seniors Out Speaking (WSOS) in-person services have been suspended, but the Senior Benefits Individual Counseling Sites (SBICS) helpline continues to field Medicare-related calls. The volume has remained consistent; and volunteers have been recruited to actively monitor the Helpline service through social media.
- Curation and creation of accessibility videos for both public and staff education as part of our planned effort to launch a Vision Lab at both Elmsford and Yonkers Will this fall.
- Reviewing tutorials on key work tools (e.g., Google Drive, Springshare) to assure that all PIE staff can offer service backup.
- Exploration of options for services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Social Media

In the midst of COVID-19, social media has been valuable. It's helping to ease isolation, stay informed, and search out moments of laughter to relieve stress. It is also proving to be an

irreplaceable tool for libraries and nonprofits scrambling to find ways of staying connected with library users, employees, and the community in Westchester.

More and more people are engaging with WLS, sharing posts and commenting positively. Below are a few samples of posts received:

"I picked up a much anticipated hold from @WestLibSys the day before my branch closed.



□ I'm also thankful my system renewed all checked out titles through 01 May."

With the situation changing so quickly, strategies will need to be reviewed for the months ahead for how to build more digital relationships, making sure that social posts are connected to the WLS website, and finding ways to keep the WLS website updated as things start to go back to "normal."

WEBS

The five WEBS seminars were suspended at the midpoint, and most of the individual sessions have already taken place. The WEBS Director has been emailing and speaking with counselors to give them updates on possible timelines, etc. The counselors are staying in touch with their groups with particular emphasis on individuals in need. Online learning resources are being highlighted that could be helpful, and group members are encouraged to stay in touch with each other.

An email was received from one client for whom WEBS had a positive impact. She wanted to know how to access Lynda.com to improve her Microsoft Office skills and had learned about it from the reference librarian who conducted the seminar on and gave a tour of the JIC (Job Information Center) at the Chappaqua Library. As a community member, she was impressed with Lynda.com's opportunities for learning and was taking advantage of her at-home time to utilize it.

In regard to completing the seminars, the ideal situation would be to finish them in May or June if the libraries are open. Should the libraries remain closed, different strategies will need to be explored for the best way to proceed. One possibility may be to hold the seminars online via Zoom; however, since the seminar is not like an academic course or class, that may not be feasible. The workshops that have been cancelled can probably be rescheduled during the late spring or summer.