Outline for Reopening
After COVID-19 Closure

Approved by Board of Trustees May 20, 2020

Amended book bin hours 5/22/20 jt/pv

As it became clear that the COVID-19 Pandemic was going to hit our area hard, the Clifton Public Library closed to the public as of Sunday, March 15; staff last reported to the buildings on Monday, March 16. The original plan was to close for two weeks and then reassess the situation, but during that time, Governor Murphy imposed statewide mandates on which entities could remain open, and which employees were considered essential and could physically be present.

As we plan for reopening, it is done with the knowledge that any steps taken will be done in conjunction with guidance from state and local authorities, along with considerations provided by other state and local library systems and input from staff, as well as in consultation with the Library Board of Trustees and Clifton Health Department.

Reopening will certainly happen in phases. Plans may be altered at any time in response to emerging staff discoveries about internal workflow logistics and the behavior, usage patterns and needs of the public. Many pieces to this plan hinge on factors that are unknown at the time of brainstorming, such as availability of cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as mandated steps and factors in the reopening of society (such as capacity limits) and availability of staff (due to health concerns and/or caretaking responsibilities and scheduling logistics in compliance with social distancing rules).

See also:
TOPCATS guidance and news
https://topcatsnj.org/

Article on Medium by John Thill posted 4/20/20
"A Phased Reopening Plan for Libraries as COVID 19 Restrictions Are Lifted"
https://medium.com/@john.alan.thill/a-phased-reopening-plan-for-libraries-as-covid-19-restrictions-are-lifted-2d96885c0c1d

PHASE 1: Return of materials

Considerations:

Everything that every patron has at home is now due back, as opposed to materials being checked out and returned in rotation on an ordinary basis. Will patrons rush to return items once they hear it's possible, or will it be a slow trickle back? How will we quarantine and clean items before discharging? Where will we store items bound for other libraries until statewide delivery is resumed?

Proposal:

Outdoor return bins in both locations will be unlocked between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Monday – Thursday, and 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday for the first few weeks to make sure that they don't overflow when staff is not around. Maintenance staff will be scheduled to make sure someone is on duty to empty the bins every hour or as often as necessary. Materials will be brought into the community rooms, where tables and barrels will be set up and labeled with the day and date of those piles of returns. Materials will be quarantined for at least three days, minimum, and possibly longer to meet the most current recommended practice.

During the second week of returns, other staff* can return to the buildings on some altered schedules or rotating basis; hygiene practices will be reviewed. Staff will then begin processing the materials out of the quarantine phase by discharging them from patrons' records and wiping them down with the appropriate cleaner before moving them out to be separated for reshelving or preparation/storage for shipping.

We will need to make space for storage. At Main, the FRIENDS Gift Gallery public area as well as their storage area behind the circulation office will provide many extras shelves once cleared. If need be, Book Nook storage books can also be removed. At Allwood, Book Nook items can be moved to the basement.

Once staff feels that returns are manageable in terms of flow, storage and processing space, outdoor return bins will be available 24 hours per day.

PALS Plus recommends extending due dates for at least a month or so after returns begin so that patrons don't feel pressured to return everything on Day 1 and overwhelm us.

Miscellaneous: If statewide delivery is not going to be resumed around the same time, will PALS Plus libraries cobble together their own temporary transport system?

**Volunteers will not be in the buildings until Phase 4.*

PHASE 2: Lending out materials

Considerations:

We'd like to provide patrons with materials as soon as possible after the materials return process is under control. This will involve working with PALS Plus to understand what our options might be and change circulation system configurations. This would expand our scope of services and allow staff to feel out public needs and response to collection availability under a controlled environment that does not yet have the added stress of exposure to the public.

A factor out of our control is availability of the statewide delivery service. If it is available, then we can decide what level of interlibrary loan service we will provide (PALS Plus only; statewide; nationwide).

Proposal:

Current PALS Plus limits are 50 holds at a time and 75 checkouts. An initial limit on the number of holds and/or checkouts a patron can have at once, limited to the items available in our two locations, will help control flow. We will also work with PALS Plus on how often holds lists are generated to promote faster fulfillment rates.

We will probably need to do more phone service on this than usual as patrons who can't place holds electronically from home and can't do it in person during a visit will be calling for assistance.

A system for pickup of these materials will need to be instituted and will be dependent on what mandates are still in place along with currently recommended practices. Examples of pickup methods include curbside, where patrons call when they get to the building and staff delivers to their trunk; and lobby, where patrons step just inside the building just a bit, one at a time, to pick up their items. For any system, a method for checking out/verifying identity will need to be established.

PHASE 3: Allowing the public in the buildings on a limited basis

Considerations:

State and local mandates in effect; staff concerns; staff availability; adequate stock of PPE and cleaning supplies. Clear understanding of enforcement rules and options should public be challenging or defiant.

Proposals:

Require masks for everyone, staff and public.

Limit the number of people in the building and/or certain areas at once to help promote social distancing.

Modify the number of hours open to the public. Adjust to meet demand, foot traffic flow, safety concerns or cleaning regiments as necessary.

Keep public use to grab-and-go and quick reference services, except for computer or Wi-Fi use.

Reduce the number of available computers to space out the users. Computers will have shorter time limits. One-on-one help will not be available.

Do not schedule or conduct programs or group meetings immediately. Keep group and quiet study rooms closed to the public. (The reasons are two-fold: to prevent too many people from gathering together, and to allow the space to be used for staff activity (quarantining materials, storing items waiting to be shipped, storing furniture, alternate office space, etc.)). Once these spaces are reopened for public use, they will initially have a smaller occupancy size for a while.

Remove armchairs to discourage lingering.

Reduce the number of chairs per table – as well as the number of available tables.

Remove toys, puzzles and games from the children's areas.

Consider having a "greeter" or two at the door to guide patrons and explain rules to help with flow.

Any specific mandates or rules regarding children will be addressed.

PHASE 4: Allowing the public in the buildings on an unrestricted basis

Considerations:

State and local mandates in effect; well-established protocols in medical facilities for recovery of diagnosed patients; availability of vaccines. Fuller staff availability to ensure departmental coverage and functionality.

Proposals:

Keep up with increased cleaning and sanitation practices.

Promote designated time for vulnerable populations.

Continue devoting staff time and budget to remote resources and digital programming.

Investigate methods of self-service/contactless service that have not been implemented yet.

Resume homebound service with revised protocols.

Resume volunteer services on an as-needed basis. They must meet with a designated staff member to go over safety protocols first.