

Jessamyn West - May 15, 2020

Distance doesn't mean distant.

<librarian.net/talks/swboces>



Hello and thank you for having me. This talk points to some things that are online and I've assembled a list of links (plus a version of this talk including all of my notes) at the web address on the slide. Let's get started.

Thanks for being here.

We'll do what we can.

We Miss You!



First off, we're all doing the best we can and I want to acknowledge that. I do not want this talk to be a chirpy "Here's how to do more with less!" as much as a way to explain what we know about the digital divide and some things, a few things, that we know can help. You care, that's important. And nowadays caring can go a long way towards helping people whose needs may have radically shifted.



A very brief outline of who I am. The first computer I got to use was this one and ever since then I've felt like computers are fun. This may be a normal belief but it's not normative. Many people do not feel this way. I also grew up in a house with a parent who "did computers" (somewhat unusual for someone my age) and so I knew a lot of computer words and was used to them. This will come up later.



I started library school (in this building, if you can believe it, though not in this room) before the graphical web and graduated after. Since then I've done many things but the bulk of it can be summed up as "teaching people how to use computers, in a library setting" Lately I've been living in Central Vermont where I do a regular drop-in time to help people learn to use technology. I see many people who are digitally divided, for a number of reasons.

Digital Divide

Let's talk about the digital divide. It's a term people use a lot (often when someone is talking about "solving" it) but I want to sketch its outlines.

Digital Divide Definitions Developing

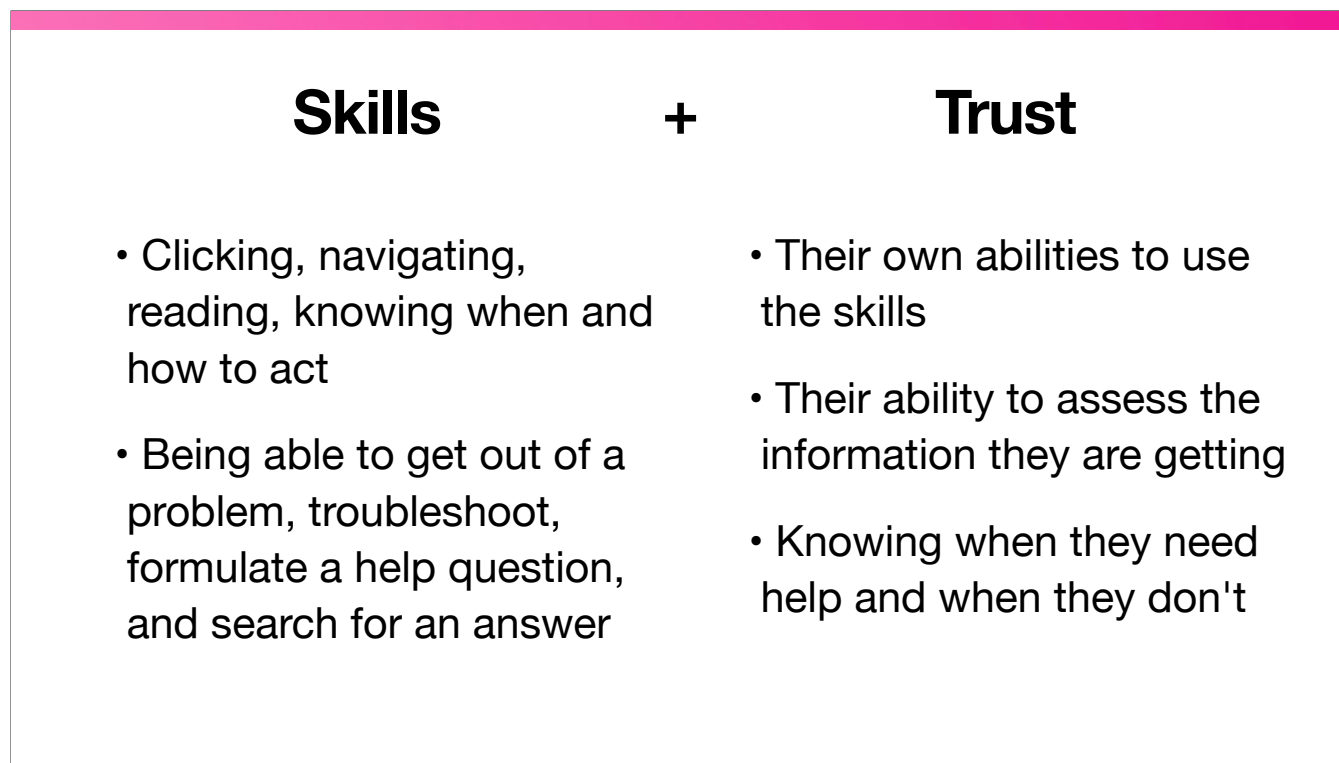
1. **Original:** No computer (b/c no money or access)
2. **Next:** No internet (b/c no money or access)
3. **Lately:** Same issues combined, though diminishing (thanks libraries!)



The definition has evolved over time. The first two options have been really well-addressed by public libraries. Go us! However the third issue gets tricky and I want to explore it more. Because if the problem is just access to computers and wifi, why didn't libraries actually just FIX this?

Digital Readiness

This is the concept I have been talking more about lately.



As more and more learning gets shifted into online spaces, both slowly over time and also suddenly over the past two months, we're looking at a new and different sort of divide which is this combination here. Are people ready to put themselves in a "teach yourself" environment? And what determines this isn't the strength of your wifi or the speed of your computer or your ability to click, it's more of a combination of things. Those skills are part of it, but there's also the trust aspect. Do you feel confident in your own abilities. Can you determine when you need help? Can you tell what is "fake news" and what is just someone with an opinion? These are all challenges and mean we may need to be teaching tech a little differently.

"Asking people about their familiarity with tech terms has been shown to be a good proxy for their overall level of digital skills."

Pew Research Center

And it can be hard to tell where people are along this spectrum. I read a fair amount about it and one of the things that can correlate with people's readiness can be, oddly enough, their knowledge of vocabulary. Someone who knows what a JPG is, will be more likely to be able to edit a JPG. This doesn't mean, of course, that teaching these terms makes people ready, but that immersing people (appropriately) in vocabulary they need to know (browser, JPG, URL) can help them and also give you an idea of how much they need to know

Digital Equity

And then, the last part of the puzzle is the issue of people who aren't digitally ready for reasons that are wrapped up in larger socioeconomic factors or, plain and simple institutionalized racism and sexism.

"...[P]aying for broadband is not as much of a choice that involves what they are willing to pay for different Internet speeds, but rather a choice between broadband service and the ability to pay for food."

Dr. Colin Rhinesmith - *Poverty and the Cost of Broadband*

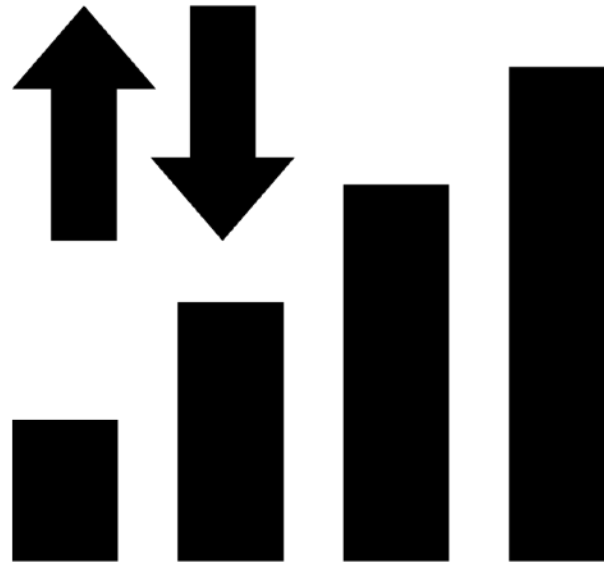
Many people who study this topic have written eloquently on the subject and I encourage you to read some of the links I've included, but the big deal is that it's tough for people to focus on a monthly internet service (getting it, paying for it, sustaining it) when they have other much larger issues to deal with.

**A cell phone is not
a computer.**



So a few examples. I use this one a lot. We see a lot of people in the media cheering at how many people are online now and those numbers have improved. But often they are sort of mushing together people with computers and people with cell phones. And don't get me wrong, cell phones are useful and having some connected device is better than nothing. But it's much harder to create on a cell phone (and much easier to be a passive consumer). A cell phone doesn't (usually) provide broadband for your household). Not all web pages are built for cellphones. Browser plug-ins like ad-blockers (mostly) or facebook purity or other things that help you control your experience aren't made for cell phones. So yay for cell phones, but they're different and it's good to know that.

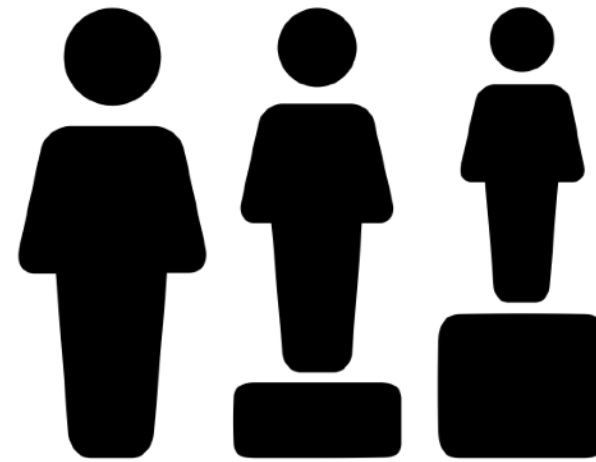
**Mobile data plans
are not home
broadband.**



Cell phones also send their data through a few major corporation's servers. A data plan on a cell phone is very different from fixed broadband at home. A cell phone often has data caps. A cell phone doesn't have net neutrality.

"Design and delivery of devices and services can... create barriers when they do not recognize the needs of all ages or cultures."

Pew Research Center



And, from a wider equity perspective, the people who are designing websites are often not thinking about all the people (the way libraries do) but most of the people. If you are a large company, you may not care if the last 5% of people can see or use your website easily, as long as 95% of them can make a purchase. (unless someone sues you) But those 5% of people care a lot! This can be a cultural thing too, the way websites talk to you, or the hoops they make you jump through. Every now and again I have to solve a CAPTCHA which involves me clicking on fifteen little squares just so I can "prove" I am a human being (training robots, incidentally). No big deal for me, though aggravating, but actually nearly impossible for someone with a shaky hand who just wants to use a website. Each click counts!

Digital Inclusion Work

1. Affordable broadband
2. Low-cost computers
3. Digital literacy training **tied** to relevant content and services
4. A tech support plan or path to enable actual **use** of 1 through 3.



So what people have said needs to happen to work on digital inclusion are these four things and I would make an argument that some sort of accessibility function (somewhere between 3 and 4) needs to be built in. Because if people see tech environments as made for "other people" they'll be less likely to engage.

New Normal

Now let's talk about where we are. And I'm not going to talk much about *waves hands* all this because we're all in it together even if what we're "in" may vary somewhat state by state.

We need to get people computers *and* internet access at the same time as we are encouraging *and* teaching them how to use both.

This is hard.

From a bare bones tech perspective, this is what I see as the mission now. Even a family with broadband and a computer may not have enough broadband and computers when there are three kids at home and two working parents.

Digital Divide Definitions During a Pandemic

1. Without help, whatever digital skills you had in the Before Times are what you have to work with.
2. All your school and work and socializing are online now, as well as most shopping, civics, recreation, and news.
3. Parents in highest-stress jobs/situations are least able to help kids who need it.
4. There **may** be some new options for improving your tech & internet situation. Support paths are confusing.
5. Everyone is in kind of a bad mood. At best.

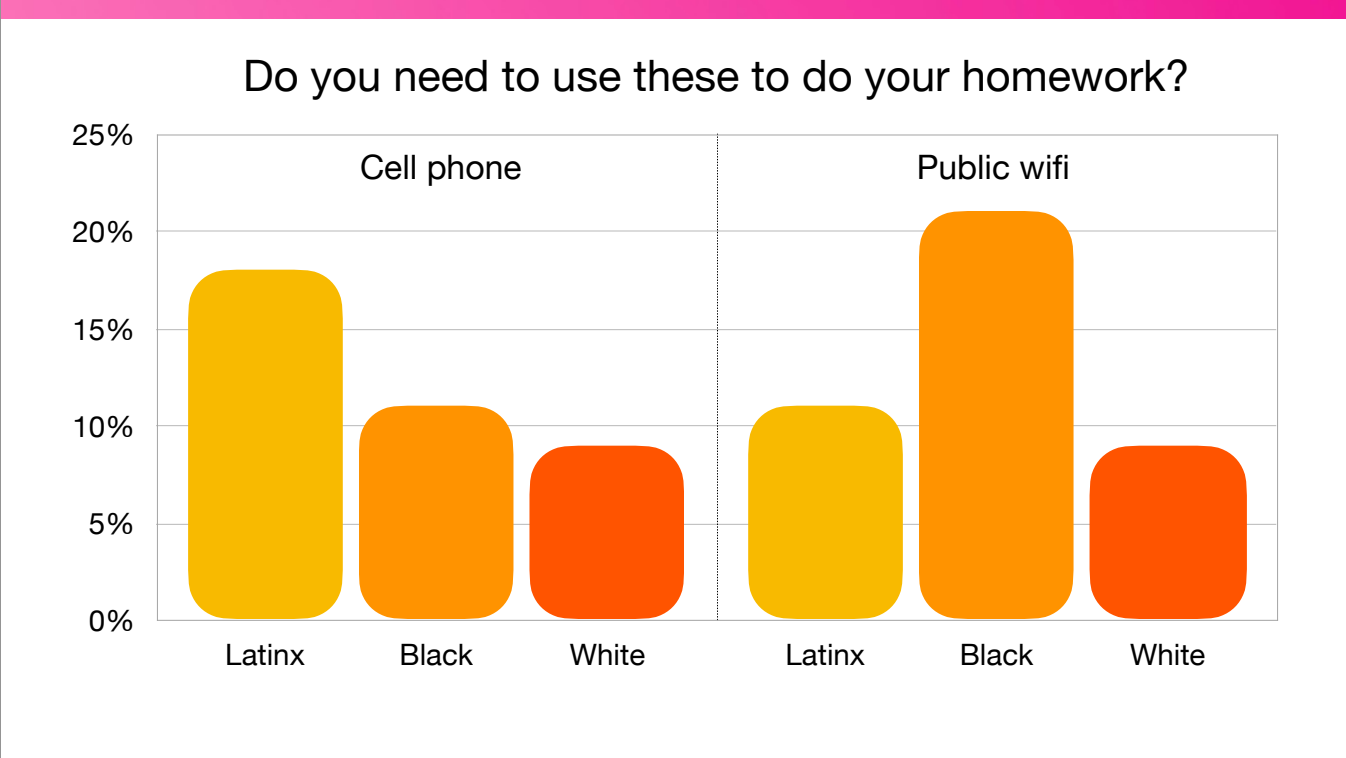


And breaking it out into parts, it's more like this. People who lack digital readiness really aren't going to be able to deal with #4 on their own, especially if they've got three kids at home and a job they still need to go to (or were laid off from) That is where you can come in, and I know you're managing your own stuff!

Homework divide, exacerbated

- 15% of U.S. households with school-age children do not have a high-speed internet connection at home.
- 35% of households with children ages 6-17 and an annual income below \$30,000 a year do not have a high-speed internet connection at home (6% for households earning \$75,000+).
- 24% of teens with an annual family income below \$30,000 said they often or sometimes cannot do homework assignments due to lack of reliable access to a computer or internet connectivity (9% for households earning \$75,000+).

The Homework divide was already sort of dicey, with kids who WENT TO SCHOOL having these challenges.



And here's a graphical representation of how this falls out among loose racial categories

Tech Considerations

So let's think about the things we're in a position to be doing about this. I'll split it up into two categories, tech and non-tech. I don't know your particular situations, so these are kind of broad strokes based on what I've been seeing in Vermont and when I talk to librarians around the country.

+ COX COMMUNICATIONS	BroadbandNow Cox Communications Coverage Map	APPLY ONLINE	Cox Connect2Compete web page
+ COX COMMUNICATIONS	BroadbandNow Cox Communications Coverage Map	PURCHASE ONLINE	News release
+ ALTICE USA (SUDDENLINK COMMUNICATIONS)	BroadbandNow's Suddenlink Communications Coverage Map	Call 1-888-633-0030	Altice Advantage web page
+ ALTICE USA (SUDDENLINK COMMUNICATIONS)	BroadbandNow's Suddenlink Communications Coverage Map	Call 1-888-633-0030	Altice Advantage web page
+ MEDIACOM COMMUNICATIONS	BroadbandNow's Mediacom Cable Coverage Map	Call 1-888-633-0030	Mediacom Connect2Compete web page
+ TDS TELECOMMUNICATIONS	BroadbandNow's TDS Telecom Availability Map	Call 1-888-287-8156	News release
+ WAVE	BroadbandNow's Wave Broadband Availability Map	Download and fill out form and drop off at local WAVE sales location	Wave Simply Internet web page
+ WAVE (City of Seattle)	City of Seattle	Download and fill out form, mail to City Of Seattle Office of Cable Communications, 700 Fifth Avenue Suite 1800 P.O. Box 94709, Seattle, WA 98124-4709.	Wave Simply Internet web page

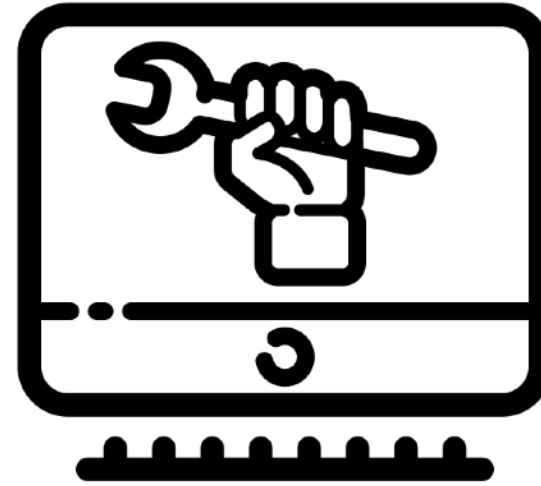
Do you know how to connect people with low-cost internet and technology; do you know the other new COVID-19 rules & regs?

More than ever, our networks are almost more important than our resources, and definitely more important than our spaces. Knowing I don't have to get my car inspected this month saved me some time and energy. Knowing they have more time to pay a property tax bill was relaxing for some of my neighbors. Knowing I could notarize documents over Zoom was a big new thing for me. Assembling a list of these new rules takes advantage of our professional skills. Copyright? FERPA?

How to Help Someone Use A Computer

Your primary goal is not to solve their problem. Your primary goal is to help them become one notch more capable of solving their problem on their own....

Help them learn to think the problem through.



The one document, the only link I would urge you to read if you look at my list of links at all is [How to Help Someone Use a Computer](#), a simple list of things to think about when you work with novice users. It's got a lot of good advice in it, and the one line that I will pull out for this talk is about problem solving or troubleshooting. We want to help people think about solving the problem, even if they don't solve this particular problem.

**If students have to use a website, is there
a handout or site that can show them
how to use that website?
If not, could you make one?**

And thinking about your role in that. Usually we point people to resources, could we be making resources? (our unemployment site in VT changed as we went into this crisis, even people who knew how to use it before may not know how to use it now. What could help?)

**If someone needs to contact tech support,
is there a handout or site that can show
them **how** to contact tech support?
If not, could you make one?**

And even a basic thing like knowing how to call the cable company if something isn't working or calling their ISP if something new is happening with their email. You know how often people don't go to a doctor and let things get worse? This is also true with IT stuff.

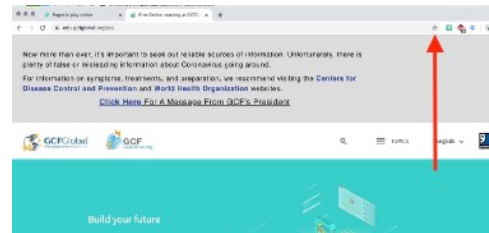
If they want to "meet" with people can you help them do that?

Can you lend them your Zoom room? What are the resources you have to share that may be new?

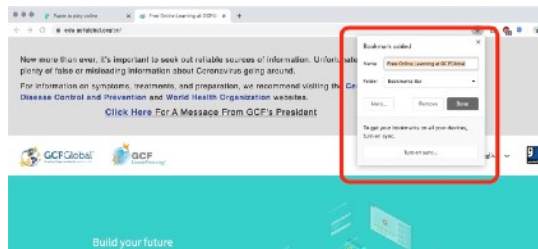
And we need to connect. And sometimes we just want to connect. And how can that happen in this new normal. And as an aside, it's a real skill to know when you need to tell someone "Just install AVG Free" and when to say "Here are a list of low cost laptops, pick one that will work for you"

Simple "how to fix this" sets of images

1. Click here



2. Then click here



With people who have low tech literacy it's not surprising the poorly written help files aren't working for them. Sometimes some diagrams that say "Look at this and then click on THAT" can really do the trick. I have a folder that is just this sort of thing in case someone is asking "How do I bookmark on Chrome again?"

New goals for our digitally divided patrons/students

...not to help them get partway there.

The goal is for them to **get there.**



This is me finally getting my landlady on Zoom. If you can screen share you can help them with tech stuff. And the trick is the goalposts have changed. You can't just say "Here's a book about how to do that, good luck!" for the most digitally divided, you kind of have to make sure they can get there (in this case we were on the phone as I told her what to look for and click on the screen)

**It's not just the
access...**

**...it's the sign, and the
parking, and the map that
shows you how to get there.***

** both literally and metaphorically*



Because sending people to a place, or having a place, is only part of it. It's also making sure they know where that place is, they know how it works, they know what to do there (this is Land O Lakes' midwestern project to provide free wifi in parking lots of places they own)

Non-Tech Considerations

A few things to think about that fall outside of the realm of pure tech

**Reassurance and empathy without chirpy optimism.
How can you say "We see you. We care. We're
here to help." and not sound like someone's bank?**



We've all gotten too many dumb emails from brands talking about how we're all in this together. Facebook added this care emoji and I am not sure how I feel about it. But unlike, say, Southwest airlines, you're actually in a position to back that up with actions. When I have some downtime and I just need to have a moment I go trawling youtube for libraries' "We miss you" videos, I can not get over how sweet all of them are.

Simple & optional

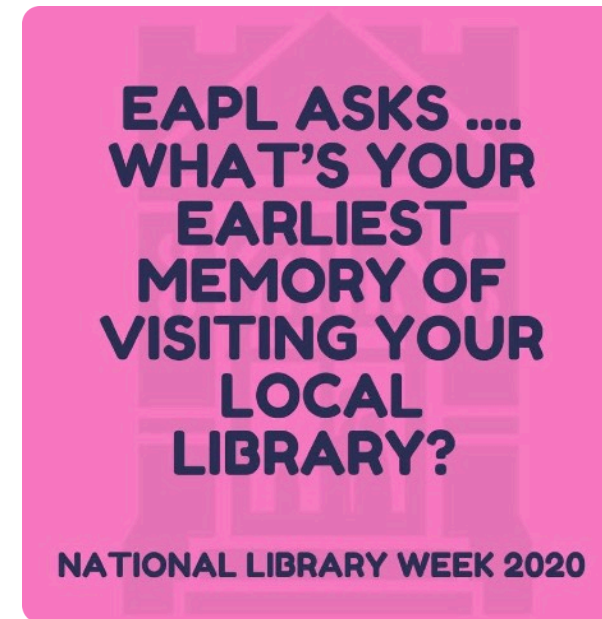
- Something live, and a backup?
- Shorter check-ins but maybe more frequent.
- What is the "space" the library occupies right now?
- What is the space they're occupying and what is going on there?



In terms of whatever programming is turning into, I think about two things. Make offerings simple and make them optional. But think about what you used to do and see if you can still do them. Monday night knitting at the library was a big deal in the before times. Now people do it over Zoom and a small piece of what they're used to is still available to them.

Copy & paste are your friend

- What are other organizations doing?
- What are other libraries doing?
- What is on the calendar?
- What's some good (or OK) news?
- How can you tell who you are not reaching?



One of our local libraries just went through their ILS and called some of their "regulars" just to check in. There's a lively debate on social media about how much people thought this was a good idea, but it went a long way towards helping people feel connected in this small rural town. Don't feel bad taking stuff from other libraries. And think hard on who may still be left out and what might be a good way to reach them.

What *can* be in person?

- The very gentlest hot potatoes
- A thing that helps with school
- A thing that helps with not-school
- A USB drive with... what?



And sometimes things still happen "in person" and this is hugely location dependent, but one of our libraries has a "Little free joke library" by the book drop. Content on USB drives isn't out of the question (though I haven't seen anyone doing it)

Inclusion = access

- Captions for videos
- Transcripts for podcasts
- Free masks if you (eventually) require masks



And always think about the last leg of the stool, making it accessible. Paid Zoom accounts get auto-captioning. Try it out. If you're doing more audio content work on getting transcripts, and as we look into opening up more, if you're going to require masks, make sure they're accessible to all (this LFL has masks and templates available)

People need...?

- Support
- Understanding & patience
- Passwords. People need to remember about 100x more passwords and if you can solve only **one** of their problems make it be the password problem because it's intense.



Staff too!

- Find ways to celebrate accomplishments and community appropriately
- Support your staff's digital challenges with time and \$\$\$
- Moving roles around to play to staff's strengths could be good for morale



And lastly, think about your staff. If they need digital help, acknowledge that and know that it may cost money. Continue to try to find ways to celebrate. Maybe if there doesn't have to be someone at the desk, the person who is good at certain things can get to do more of those things rightnow.

connection & love

- Helping create stronger bonds among and between members of your community
- Honoring achievements that would be occurring in person
- Encouraging but also saying "This is enough. **What we need is here.**"

QUARANZINE

connection & love during times of social distancing & isolation

0.5 | May, 2020






**Still resourceful,
just with new resources**

Things have both changed entirely and also not-changed. We're good at being resourceful we're just using new resources.

The library building might be closed...



Connect with us online through chat, email, or Ask a Librarian

...but we're still here for you!

These are just some of the people who are available remotely to assist you with services & research needs while the campus buildings are closed.

More than ever, we need to put a human face on our digital outreach and contacts and connections.

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Questions

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