

Counting Library Programs and Attendance During COVID-19 Closures

The State Library recognizes that many libraries are changing the nature of public programs offered during the COVID-19 pandemic as they expand services to engage their communities in new and different ways. State Library staff have had several questions as to how libraries should count virtual programs and attendance at virtual programs, and how libraries should count “hours open” for limited service provision.

Counting Virtual Programs and Attendance

The *Annual Report for Public and Association Libraries* currently asks for the number of programs and program attendance by age group (children, young adults, and adults). Currently the definitions, which are Federal definitions, do not include virtual programs. The State Library encourages libraries to collect data on the number of live virtual programs and live virtual program attendance, and also data on recorded virtual programs and recorded virtual program attendance, whether offered through the library’s Facebook page, or the library’s web site, or through some other platform.

The State Library recommends that virtual programming data be collected separately from data collected about physical face-to-face programs. Data about live virtual programs should be recorded separately from data about recorded virtual programs. As the State Library gets more guidance from IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services) about counting live and recorded virtual programs and program attendance, we will share this information with library systems/libraries.

Collecting data about virtual programs will enable libraries to report this important program activity data to their governing boards, the community and also share the data with researchers in future surveys.

Counting Hours Open

The State Library has also received questions as to how libraries should report data about “Hours Open” for 2020. During the past few difficult weeks, some libraries continued to provide limited services for the public even though the Library Building was closed. The question received was: “Should these hours of limited services be reported under HOURS OPEN?”

The current definition for HOURS OPEN is: “This is the number of annual public service hours for each outlet only. Include the actual hours open for public service. For bookmobiles, count only the hours during which the bookmobile is open to the public. Minor variations in public service hours need not be included. Extensive hours closed to the public due to natural disasters or other events should be excluded from the count even if the staff is scheduled to work.”

This means counting only those hours that libraries are FULLY open to the public.

Again, as with Virtual Programs, libraries that offered limited services are encouraged to keep a separate record tracking the hours when the Library was closed to the public, but the Library offered limited services at the Library Building such as curbside delivery, a drive-up window or lobby only services. This data may be used in future reports to governing boards, to the local community and also to share with researchers in future surveys.

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