Exit strategy for libraries, archives and documentation centres
Guide with advice for the phased resumption of operations
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Notes

The corona crisis has a major impact on our entire society. On 13 March, far-reaching measures in the fight against COVID-19 came into force in Belgium. Experts agree that we have a long way to go with the coronavirus. This requires an adjustment of our working processes, both in the short and long term.

On Friday 24 April, the National Security Council announced its exit strategy, by which Belgium intends to phase out the measures taken. Since 8 June, freedom is again the rule rather than the exception. There are six golden rules that must always be applied, and there will also be a basic protocol for the cultural sector. On the basis of this protocol, sector-specific guides can be adjusted and supplemented.

With this guide, the VVBAD intends to provide practical advice to the information sector in order to return to normal operation in phases, if the National Security Council allows this again. The opinions in this document are a guide and do not entail any obligations. We would like to emphasise the fact that each institution can have different points of attention and timing because of its individuality.

Regardless of phase of lifting restrictions, a number of rules remain in force by order of the government:

- Limiting contacts between people.
- Respecting safe distances.
- Maintaining good hygienic reflexes, also known as 'barrier gestures'.

In addition, covering the mouth and nose is recommended in public areas. You can do this with a mouth mask, scarf or bandana. In itself, a mouth mask does not provide adequate protection, the combination with hygiene measures and physical distance is necessary. If it is not possible to take the necessary safety measures for a particular service, it is advisable not to restart that service for the time being. The municipality, or the parent organisation of the library or archive, decides which accommodations it opens up or not, when and under what conditions.

These conditions may be more stringent than the general safety measures, based on (1) the impossibility of complying with the general rules on social/physical distancing and hygiene, (2) the risk of group formation, or (3) the inability of control (and any) enforcement where it is desirable.

The list of tips and advice in this guide is not exhaustive and can be updated at any time. Do you have any questions or comments? Contact us through vvbad@vvbad.be.

1. GENERAL GUIDELINES FROM THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

- Stay home when you feel sick.
- General hygiene measures (e.g. hand hygiene, sneezing and coughing in the elbow).
- Keep at least 1.5 meters distance from others.
- It is mandatory to wear a mouth mask on public transport, in other places it is strongly recommended.
- Remote working remains the norm wherever possible.
- For more information: www.info-coronavirus.be

2. PHASED REOPENING
2.1 Public libraries

This chapter outlines a proposal of the possible stages of a phased reopening of public libraries. The first step has already been taken by most libraries during the lockdown, given that they have been offering a public service. The National Security Council has given the green light to move to the second phase. The implementation of the next phases is conditional and subject to the current guidelines of the National Security Council.

Step 1 (lockdown): Limited service via a pick-up system. -> from March 13
- Booking materials by telephone or electronic means.
- The library prepares orders (in line with the relevant guidelines).
- Users pick-up books on appointment.
- User will pick up their package in a separate room (if possible).
- Handing in materials preferably via the book-drop. If this is not possible, the loan period can be extended.
- Materials are quarantined for at least three days after delivery.
- Mobile services (e.g. the bibliobus) are suspended. These vehicles (with limited space) cannot guarantee the distance measures for the staff and for the users.

Step 2: Limited access to the libraries for the public (access to the collections). -> from May 18
- Public access to the library is still limited.
- Access is only for borrowing and handing in materials.
- Spaces where people may otherwise stay for any period remain closed (newspaper corner, reading room, study areas, seating...). Seats, seats and so on are removed or made inaccessible if possible.
- A takeaway system can remain in parallel depending on the needs and real situation on the ground.
- Public computers can be used by appointment and with the necessary hygiene measures.
- Group visits (e.g. class visits) are not yet possible.
- However, schools can make arrangements with the library to access the collections, in accordance with the imposed measures (e.g. via book packages). Suggestions:
  - Reservations by telephone or electronic means.
  - Pick up book packages for the classroom or school.
- Return of materials borrowed by the classes is organized in consultation between the library and the school/class. The materials will be returned. If this is not possible, the school guarantees the storage of the works in accordance with the conditions agreed with the library.

Step 3: Reopening the residences of the libraries to the public. -> June 8
- Areas where people can spend time (newspaper corner, reading room, seating, study areas, coffee corner...) are reopened to the public. This is conditional on following rules around social distancing and reservation.

- Access to public PCs for people who don't have internet at home.
- Meetings and meetings with a maximum of 20 people can take place.
- Social distancing rules and hygiene measures must still be respected.
- Mobile services (e.g. the bibliobus) can be restarted, with strict compliance with precautionary measures (limiting number of visitors, use of mouth masks...).

Step 4: Re-enlistment of public activities. -> July 1
- At this stage, (certain) activities with the public can be re-organized. The meeting function of the library will gradually be used again. It will be important to follow the general guidelines of the National Security Council. For example, major events are prohibited until August 31.
- During the activities, the distance rules and hygiene regulations will have to be followed properly.
- Groups and classes can visit the library again by appointment.

2.2 University and College Libraries
Colleges and universities are working on implementing a contact-free campus, based on government guidelines. The colleges are meeting within the Flemish Colleges Council (VLHORA) with infectiologist Prof. Erika Vlieghe in order to draw up plans for a contact-less campus and will follow the guidelines drawn out there.

2.3 Archives and Documentation Centres

Step 1: Employees on the shop floor.
- Resume non-urgent archive processing in the workplace.
- Remote searches and necessary reservation actions (internal and external).
- The reading room remains closed.

Step 2: Limited reading room operation.
- Use of the reading room is possible by appointment.

Step 3: Normal reading room operation.
- Return to normal reading room operation.
- Back to normal operation in terms of selection and acquisition of archives.

Step 4: Resume normal operation archive (including public activities).
- Public activities such as exhibitions and lectures can be re-organised.

3. Safe Return to Work
Working from home remains the norm, but in the information sector there are already many employees at work on the work floor. The first step in the exit strategy will require comprehensive security measures to ensure safe organisation of work in the workplace.

For back-office employees
- Keep 1.5 meters distance from others.
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water.
- Encourage remote working where possible. Give priority to employees who fall into a risk group or have a risky home situation.
- Adjust the office layout with plexiglass or provide sufficient distance between the workstations (for example, use meeting rooms and lunch-rooms to ensure dispersion).
- Don't shake hands.

- Stay at home if you have any of the following symptoms: runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, mild cough, increase in temperature.
- Communicate the guidelines clearly within your team.
- Sanitise your workplace daily, including work supplies. Choose a fixed workplace and do not share materials. If this isn't possible, use disinfectant or a plastic film that you renew with each use (for example, a protective cover or household foil over a keyboard).
- Create an overview of tasks that can happen from home.
- Spread the lunch breaks.
- Make sure that employees work when and where in the building.
- Consider a shift system, where regular teams work together at the same time, in order to reduce the possibility of contamination between employees.
- Limit the volunteer operation (on site) for as long as necessary. Take into account the risk groups:
  - 65 years and older;
  - 18 years and older with an underlying condition;
  - people with diabetes;
  - overweight people.

The federal government, together with the GEES, is establishing a charter for older people who volunteer to give them a little more clarity about the activities they can do safely.

More tips for a safe working environment can be found in the generic guide of the Federal Public Service (FPS) Employment, Labour and Social Consultation: www.werk.belgie.be/nl/nieuws/generieke-gids-om-de-verspreiding-van-covid-19-op-het-werk-tegen-te-gaan.

4. Libraries

Not all libraries started the exit strategy from the same point. Many public libraries organised a takeaway service during the lockdown. Other libraries have only started or have skipped this step during the process of lifting restrictions. Therefore, this chapter first briefly deals with some points that were important in step 1 (limited service during the lockdown), in addition to the guidelines for back office tasks cited in chapter 3. These tips can still be used in step 2, if this seems appropriate. After this we give tips for the specific organization of step 2, the limited reopening to the public and additional tips for starting the stay function in step 3.

4.1 Points of interest from step 1 (limited service during lockdown)
Takeaway services
- Have the books reserved (online, by phone and/or via email), so that your employees can prepare them in advance, with gloves on.
- Assign each borrower a time slot for the collection of a reservation. Make sure that as few people as possible come to the library at the same time. Only allow them to enter the entrance hall to pick up a package in your name, and avoid contact between them (among themselves) and the employees.
- Extend the loan period of books or provide a quarantine period of 72 hours before the returned books. (On 28 May, the VVBAD was informed by the GEES that this is no longer necessary. Pay attention to good hand hygiene.)

Returned Material
- Make use of a book-drop if possible.

- Place books in quarantine after 72 hours of repossession or proper disinfection to prevent the virus from spreading through that route. (On 28 May, the VVBAD was informed by the GEES that this is no longer necessary. Pay attention to good hand hygiene)
- You can choose to disinfect the submitted material, but pay attention with sensitive materials. Focus on intensely used materials, such as children's books, play and learning materials, tablets, laptops, and so on.

Deliveries (for suppliers)
- Keep 1.5 meters distance from others.
- Agree in advance on a place where the goods are delivered.
- Ask to give the arrival time 15 minutes in advance.
- Wear gloves.
- Consider delivery at the door.

Digital Services
- Encourage users to make the most of digital services (see section 4.3 for more information).
- University libraries and college libraries can scan certain chapters on request for urgent questions from, for example, thesis students.

4.2 What do you pay attention to when reopening to the public? (Step 2 - from 18 May)
For information: Libraries with a heritage collection usually make these materials available in a reading room. At 5.2 under the chapter 'Archives and Documentation Centres' you will find the exit strategy for reopening a reading room.

General Provisions
- Hang rules for users both inside and outside of your library (see Annex 1 for inspiration).
- Books need no longer be quarantined or disinfected.
- Point to one or more 'corona managers', employees who manage all measures and follow their correct application.
- Provide a steward at the entrance at a large library during the opening hours. Encourage visitors to keep the visit short so that multiple people can visit the library.
- See the possibility of custom opening hours to safely perform back-office tasks during closing hours.
- Limit the number of users. A generally accepted starting point is a maximum of 1 visitor per 15 m². Please also take into account the specific characteristics of the location and avoid concentrations at certain points. Limiting the number of users can be done in several ways:
    o Via a ticketing system;
    o Provide only as many shopping baskets or bags as the maximum number of visitors allowed. Use of these items should be mandatory. Every time a user comes out with his/her basket, it is disinfected and the next user is allowed in. You can also provide a buffer with a number of additional access items, so there's time to sanitize the item. In this scheme, designate a supervisor who is responsible for disinfecting.
- Indicate where the queue is and where it may be allowed to walk.
- Consider the following risk groups:
    o 65 years and older;
    o 18 years and older with an underlying condition;
    o People with diabetes;
    o Overweight people. Provide them with a separate opening moment after a cleaning in the library. Or organize a library-at-your-home visit for these groups.
- Avoid situations where people have to be close to each other.

- Don't organize activities yourself. See if you can support local projects in the long term (e.g. support for students who have lost teaching time, activities for people who spend their holidays at home, ...).
- Help to disseminate the local information (digital, but also by way of posters, flyers...).
- The replenishment and ordering of the collection takes place outside the opening hours around or in closed aisles.
- Make sure you have the possibility of contactless payment, disinfection gel or cotton swabs at the payment machine.

Hygiene
- o Provide (contactless) alcohol gel, tissues and lockable pedal-bins for users in different places, and especially at the entrance and exit.
- o Implement regular cleaning processes (during short closing times). Focus on surfaces such as plastic and metals.
- o Clean lending points and access items regularly. If necessary, prepare cleaning equipment so that users can clean loan points themselves before use. Close off lending points that are placed too close together.
- o Provide employees with the right equipment (face masks, gloves, alcohol gel, opportunity to wash hands regularly). Provide the correct instructions for use.
- o Ensure proper ventilation of the room (by opening the windows) for the arrival of the public.

Infrastructure
- o Leave doors open whenever possible and avoid unnecessary contact with door handles.
- o Provide a separate entrance and exit.
- o Enforce one-way traffic (with arrows, tape, drop-off tape, bollards, panels...).
- o Provide guidelines for the use of toilets. Make sure there is soap and water to wash hands and make sure to plan properly for cleaning the toilets. Ask visitors to close the toilet seat before flushing.
- o Close all non-essential facilities such as coffee machines to the public.
- o Encourage users to plan their visit so they can already consult the catalogue at home and find out which materials they want to borrow. If necessary, provide a limited number of computers to consult the catalogue, with cleaning materials or have an employee provide support.
- o Close reading corners, tables and other seats. Do not allow visitors to read in the library. If possible, remove the seating furniture and non-lending materials (e.g. magazines) inaccessible.
- o Provide plexiglass at the counters.
- o Clear aisles of obstacles.
- o Limit the use of the lift to the necessary and up to 1 person at a time. Let visitors mainly use the stairs.

Communication
- o Make sure that all employees are aware of the guidelines.
- o Ensure clear communication about the guidelines to your users (website, social media, newsletters, posters...).
- o Encourage the use of your digital services.
- o Ask visitors to plan their visit if possible and consult the catalogue in advance.
- o Ask visitors to come to the library alone if possible.
- o Ask visitors to keep their visit to the library short.
- o Appeal to users' sense of responsibility for abiding to the rules.

4.3 What to look for when reopening the accommodation areas (Step 3, from 8 June)
- Apply the measures for safe back-office operation and safe lending of books as described in the previous points.
- Visitors can consult newspapers and magazines again. Do make sure that there are clear guidelines and a system of reservation or registration in order to allow for contact tracing.
- Make public computers available on reservation and with the necessary facilities to disinfect hands and surfaces (after each use). If necessary, use a replaceable (household) film or a protective cover over the keyboard. Provide sufficient distance and, if necessary, place plexiglass screens between user computers.
- Meetings and formations in group of max. 20 people can take place. The guidelines from the protocols for these specific activities apply to this purpose.
- Public activities are not yet allowed to take place.

4.4 Tips for a wide range of digital offerings for public libraries
CultureConnect
- Digital Stage.
- Fundels: interactive children's books. Stream Movies.
- Lending Platform e-books.
- My Reading Ipper.
- Reading Community.
- Bieblo: reading inspiration for children.
- Livestreaming.
- Gopress Archive (free).

Reaching Target Audiences through Social Media
- Challenge people with a Facebook or Instagram challenge. E.g. the #LeuvenLeestChallenge on Instagram or the Facebook challenge of Stage At Home.
- Use online reading moments.

Encourage Reading for Pleasure
- Upload a printable reading bingo for children (or adults) to your website.
- The updated book search tool from 'Everyone Reads' gives children and young people up to the age of 18 tailor-made book tips.
- Organize a Battle of the Books.
- Organize an online book club.
- Use QR codes to encourage children to read.

Online Help
- Develop a tool to help users with their questions about digital matters online. E.g. the Digidoctor of the Library of Bruges.
- Try to replace your activities with online activities. E.g. Read Dutch Together Online by Muntpunt.
- Organize a platform for homework help. E.g. on the basis of a call-hour or chat moment.

5. Archives and Documentation Centres
A first step out of the lockdown will for most archives and documentary centres mean that shop-floor operations will be resumed. For this purpose, the advice for back office tasks in chapter 3 can be used. The reading room will remain closed during the first step. A possible next step in the exit

strategy, described under Chapter 2 as the second step for archives and documentation centres, involves a limited reading room operation. This chapter explores these two first steps.

5.1 Points of attention from step 1 (employees on the shop floor)

Archival Work

- o Limit the number of employees per archive space.
- o Limit the use of the lifts to 1 person at a time.
- o Make as much use as possible of digital tools to carry out inspection tasks. During visits, the protocol of the organisation/municipality to be visited is observed.
- o Provide a 24-hour quarantine period for records of paper and cardboard and 72 hours for pieces with smooth surfaces.

Digital Services

- o Bet on digital services where possible. E.g. Digital consultation and digitisation on demand.
- o Also look at the possibilities, time investment and costs of digital services in the long term. E.g. dealing with information questions by telephone (or via chat).

Public Action

- o If an archive institution has a museum department, or an exhibition, the guidelines of the museums apply to that part. If these guidelines cannot be met, the exhibition will not be physically opened to the public.
- o Review the educational tasks and projects scheduled from the archive setting in school programs and consultation with the schools. Make sure that these tailored to the education guidelines and see if digital solutions are possible.

5.2 What do you pay attention to when the reading room is reopened to the public? (Step 2)

General

- o Hang rules for users on the outside of the archive. Repeat these inside the reading room.
- o Provide a steward at the entrance to large institutions.
- o Limit opening hours to perform back-office tasks during closing hours.
- o Prevent situations where people come into contact with each other. Provide a walking route along the reception, the desk and through the study room.
- o Opt for a limited (reading room) opening:
    - o Limit (in the first phase) access to the reading room to the strictly necessary, such as searches for building permit applications, notarial searches to settle an inheritance and thesis research. Avoid searches for recreational research such as genealogical or local historical searches.
    - o Limit the number of visitors and limit them to 1 person per study. A generally accepted starting point is a maximum of 1 visitor per 15 m². Please also take into account the specific characteristics of the location and avoid concentrations at certain points Forms. Limiting the number of users can be done in several ways:
        - ▪ Via a ticketing system;
        - ▪ Only provide as many shopping baskets or bags as the maximum number of visitors allowed. Use of these items should be mandatory. Every time a user comes out with his/her basket, it is disinfected and the next user is allowed in. You can also provide a buffer with a number of additional access items, so there is time to disinfect the item. In this scheme, designate a person who is responsible for disinfecting.
    - o Work by appointment and with a time slot. Provide a separate time slot for each visitor so that the visitors do not arrive together.

- o Have archive documents booked in advance (digital, email and/or by phone). If possible, prepare the requested works at the user's place. Provide clear guidelines to prevent the mixing of archival documents. It is not possible to request additional archival documents on the spot.
- o Ask visitors to bring their own laptop.
- o Provide a counter with a screen where visitors can get information and support.

Hygiene
- o Provide (contactless) alcohol gel, tissues and lockable pedal-bins for users in different places, and especially at the entrance and exit.
- o Clean user spaces after each use.
- o For the consultation of heritage materials, supporting materials are often made available to reading room users. Used pencils, lead weights, book cushions etc. must be cleaned after each use before being put back into use. This can be done, for example, by using a rotation system with boxes.
- o Provide employees with the right equipment (facemasks, gloves, alcohol gel, opportunity to wash hands regularly). Provide the correct instructions for use.
- o Ensure proper ventilation of the room (by opening the windows) for the arrival of the public.

Infrastructure
- o Leave doors to the reading room open and avoid unnecessary contact with door handles.
- o Provide (if possible) a separate entrance and exit.
- o Provide guidelines regarding the use of toilets, cloakroom so that the distance measures can also be stored here. For example, only make a limited number accessible and clean them after each use.
- o Close all non-essential facilities such as coffee machines to the public.
- o Provide fixed user places throughout the reading room. Provide every user spot with the rules. Remove unnecessary seats.
- o Ask visitors to bring their own computer. If you do make use computers available, do so on reservation and with the necessary facilities to disinfect hands and surfaces (after each use). If necessary, use a replaceable (household) film or a protective cover over the keyboard. Provide sufficient distance and, if necessary, place plexiglass screens between the user computers.
- o Provide plexiglass at the counters.
- o Clear aisles of obstacles.

Communication
- o Make sure that all employees, volunteers and visitors are aware of the guidelines. Make sure that you have clear communication about the guidelines to your users (website, social media, newsletters, posters...). Repeat these when making appointments.
- o Work through digital services where possible.

5.3 Tips for digital service for archives
Online Help
- o Develop tools to help users online with their questions about digital searches in the catalog.
- o Provide online training courses for recreational research such as historical, genealogical and local history research. Focus on digital possibilities.

6. Useful Links
- o An overview of the measures and FAQs of the FPS Public Health: www.info-coronavirus.be/nl.

- o Campaign material in the fight against COVID-19: www.info-coronavirus.be/en/campagne.
- o Generic Guide of the Federal Public Service (FPS) Employment, Labour and Social Consultation to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at work: www.werk.belgie.be/nl/nieuws/generieke-gids-om-de-verspreiding-van-covid-19- [op-het-werk-tegen-te-gaan](http://www.werk.belgie.be/nl/nieuws/generieke-gids-om-de-verspreiding-van-covid-19-op-het-werk-tegen-te-gaan).
- o The Department of Culture, Youth and Media has an information page on COVID-19 with FAQs that are useful for the cultural sector: www.cjsm.be/informatie-covid-19.
- o The VVSG has an overview of police decisions by province and the procedures and guidelines for local authorities: www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/coronavirus-actuele-informatie-en-richtlijnen.
- o The IFLA: COVID-19 library information page. www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries.
- o EBLIDA newsletter on the directives in several European countries: www.eblida.org/news/april-newsletter-special-issue3.html.
- o Tips for disinfection and communication when reopening the library: www.ctlibrarians.org/page/c19reopen.
- o Frequently Asked Questions about the Culture Connection library system: www.leerplatform.cultuurconnect.be/courses/bibliotheken-in-tijden-van-corona www.leerplatform.cultuurconnect.be/courses/bibliotheken-in-tijden-van-corona/lessons/hoe-gedeeltlijk-heropenen .
- o Recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid 19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6B.
- o Mensura's advice on an approach for employers and employees during the corona crisis: www.mensura.be/nl/corona.

Frequently Asked Quesitons

Should materials that are handed into the library be quarantined or disinfected?
Now that the libraries are open, there is no obligation to disinfect the materials when handing them in. You can do this, of course. It is important that employees who process the materials pay attention to good hand hygiene, do not touch their face during processing and then wash their hands properly. The GEES recommends that we strive for a workable way of working that we can continue to apply for a long time. Good hand hygiene and keeping away from each other remain important recommendations.

Are there guidelines for giving training?
The guidelines that also apply to adult education apply:
www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/coronavirus-informatie-voor-volwassenenonderwijs.

Are there guidelines for organizing small-scale activities from 1 July?
To do this, our sector will have to follow the guidelines that apply to other sectors as well. These guidelines for activities and events are currently being worked on. It will certainly be important to take proper security measures and consult with the local government.

Annex 1: Rules for Users - Libraries

With a phased reopening to the public, it is advisable to communicate clearly to your users. For example, you can display the following rules at the entrance and in the library itself.

Rules
- o Keep 1.5 meters distance from others, both inside and outside the library establishment.
- o Don't shake hands.
- o Come to the library alone.
- o Stay home if you have any of the following symptoms: colds, runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, mild cough, increase in temperature.
- o Stay home if a roommate has one of these complaints.
- o Be in solidarity and keep your visit as short as possible.
- o Borrow books purposefully. Preferably look up your book in advance in the catalogue or book it in advance.
- o Don't just take books off the rack. Only do that if you're actually going to borrow the book.
- o Always follow the instructions of the employees.

Annex 2: Rules for Users - Archives

With a phased reopening to the public, it is advisable to communicate clearly to your users. For example, you can display the following rules at the entrance and in the reading room.

Rules
- o Keep 1.5 meters distance from others, both inside and outside the archive.
- o Don't shake hands.
- o Stay home if you have any of the following symptoms: colds, runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, mild cough, increase in temperature.
- o Stay home if a roommate has one of these complaints.
- o Limit the reading room visit to one person per search and to the time slot provided.
- o View only one archival piece at a time to avoid mixing. Put the archival item you are working with aside before you start the next one.
- o It is not possible to request additional archival documents.
- o Always follow the instructions of the employees.