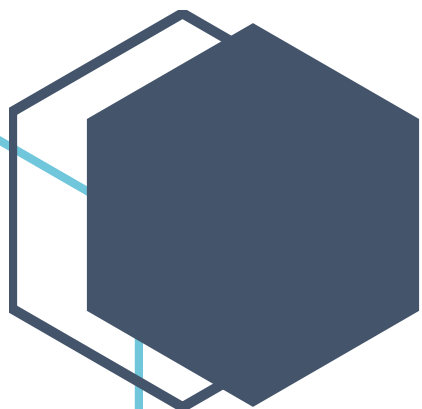# Checking in During Covid: Survey Results

A snapshot of how the literacy sector in New Brunswick has been impacted by Covid
Fall 2020

Literacy Coalition
of New Brunswick Ltd.

www.nbliteracy.ca

Contents

Overview

Purpose

With the arrival of COVID-19 this past spring came drastic changes to our learning and working environments. The Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick conducted this survey in order to get a snapshot of how the literacy sector in New Brunswick has been impacted by Covid and how they have adapted to this crisis.

Methodology

Participants were contacted via email and invited to complete the survey online via Google Forms. There were 11 questions in total, with a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions. The multiple-choice questions also included an "other" option, where participants were able to include additional information. The survey was available to complete online for two weeks (from September 11th to September 25th, 2020). All responses reported in this survey will remain anonymous.

Respondents

Participation in this survey was completely voluntary. A total of 92 people from many different organizations were contacted, and we received 40 responses. Responders were from a range of adult, early childhood and community literacy program providers including family resources centres, early learning and childcare programs, community adult learning programs, tutoring and after school programs and government literacy programs.

Executive Summary

The Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick conducted a survey in the fall of 2020 to get a snapshot of how the literacy sector in New Brunswick has been impacted by Covid. We received 40 responses from a range of literacy program providers including family resources centres, early learning and childcare programs, community adult learning programs, tutoring and afterschool programs and government literacy programs.

Findings

Over half (65%) reported that they worked from home during the lockdown but have now returned to their normal workplace. The top issues while working at home were missing social connections and not having the same resources as they did at their usual workplace. 60% of respondents said their programs had moved online, and 48% said their program had shut down, but has now resumed. Some organizations experienced an increased demand for their services, but most had no change in demand.

Additional challenges were not being able to meet in person, adapting programs to deliver online, difficulty engaging families and learners online and increased costs due to PPE. Respondents also reported that many of their learners were rural and lacked adequate access to internet and technology.

When asked what would help their organization, about half identified staff training for teaching online, leading webinars and using technology. Having staff trained to facilitate sessions for parents on Zoom programs and more technology resources for participants was also mentioned.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- It is important to recognize the critical role of literacy program facilitators and volunteers and provide continuous professional development opportunities and support for them.
- An emphasis on digital literacy for learners, families, participants and program providers is required.
- Increased access to technology and internet capacity is critical for rural and vulnerable populations.
- While moving online has brought some benefits, it has limitations for those whose personal qualities or life circumstances make learning at home difficult. Going forward, blended programming with the option of in person time is recommended to help ensure equity and access for all.

Notable Quotes:

"Keeping our clients engaged in our programming has been very challenging."

• • •

"COVID forced the change in service delivery that was needed and unsuccessful for years."

• • •

"Adult learners fear coming to class in person, even though health protocols are being maintained."

• • •

"Creativity and adaptation have defined us as an organization.

• • •

"We are spending more time teaching digital literacy skills in case of another lockdown."
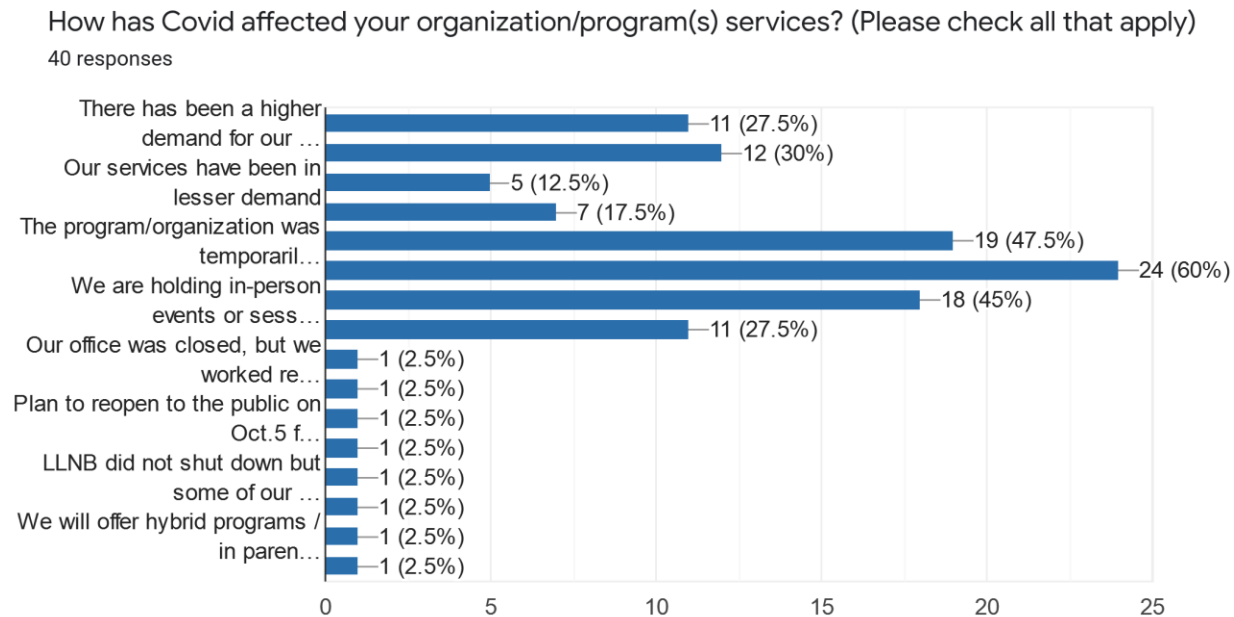
Results: Question by Question

There were 12 questions in total for respondents to answer. Three of these were demographic related: name, organization and email address. This data will not be recorded here, as all responses will be kept anonymous. There were 9 questions in total whose results will be broken down question by question in this section. Each multiple-choice question also had an "other" option. This allowed respondents to write in their own answer.

Q: How has Covid affected your program(s)? (Check all that apply)

*Note: in "check all that apply" questions, respondents can check as many options as they wish.

How has Covid affected your organization/program(s) services? (Please check all that apply)
40 responses

Category	Value
There has been a higher demand for our …	11 (27.5%)
	12 (30%)
Our services have been in lesser demand	5 (12.5%)
	7 (17.5%)
The program/organization was temporaril…	19 (47.5%)
	24 (60%)
We are holding in-person events or sess…	18 (45%)
	11 (27.5%)
Our office was closed, but we worked re…	1 (2.5%)
	1 (2.5%)
Plan to reopen to the public on Oct.5 f…	1 (2.5%)
	1 (2.5%)
LLNB did not shut down but some of our …	1 (2.5%)
	1 (2.5%)
We will offer hybrid programs / in paren…	1 (2.5%)
	1 (2.5%)

*Note: each of the answers with 2.5% marks when a respondent used the "other" option to write in their own answer.

60% of respondents said their programs have been moved online. Of the programs that shut down, 48% have resumed, and 18% have not reopened yet.

30% reported that the demand for their program has not changed, while 28% said the demand has increased. A small number (13%) said the demand for their program decreased.

SUMMARY: Most of the programs were moved online. About half of the programs that temporarily shut down have now resumed. Most organizations either did not see a change in the demand for their services or had an increased demand.

Q: What changes, if any, were made to your program(s)? (Long answer question)

*Note: this was not a required question, so not everyone gave a response.

> *"We are spending more time teaching digital literacy skills in case of another lockdown."*

Overall, the main change was shifting programs that were normally held in person to an online platform. In person programs are currently permitted, but with Covid restrictions and regulations, these programs needed to be adjusted to take place in smaller groups and meet social distancing requirements.

Some organizations have switched to a blended approach with some portions of their programs being available online and in person.

SUMMARY: Covid has forced some organizations to move online, while others are operating with Covid restrictions and/or using a blended approach.

Q: Have you or your co-workers worked from home since Covid arrived? (Multiple choice)

Have you or your co-workers worked from home since Covid arrived?
40 responses
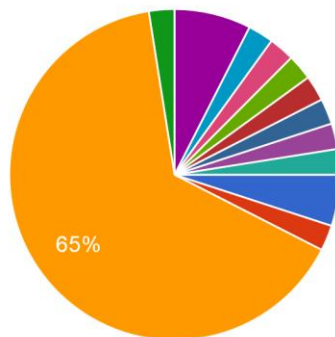
- Yes, but we are planning on returning…
- Yes, and there are no plans to return t…
- Yes, but we are back in our usual wor…
- No, we stayed in our usual workplace
- I have always worked from home
- We have had a mixture with most peo…
- As a volunteer organization, we have…
- three staff stayed on in the office and…

▲ 1/2 ▼

- 65% of respondents reported that they were working from home during the lockdown but are back at their usual workplace now.
- 8% have always worked from home.

- 3% said they are still working from home with no plans to return yet, and 5% said they are returning soon.

In the "other" option, one respondent said they are using a blended system, with some staff working from home and some in the office. Another respondent said three of their staff worked from home, while four people were laid off.

SUMMARY: Most of the respondents were working from home during the lockdown but have now returned to their usual workplace.

Q: What other challenges, if any, have you experienced if you have been or are still working from home? (Please check all that apply)

*Note: as there were many different options that respondents could check, the percentage next to each option is the number of people who selected it.

What other challenges, if any, have you experienced if you have been or are still working from home? (Please check all that apply)
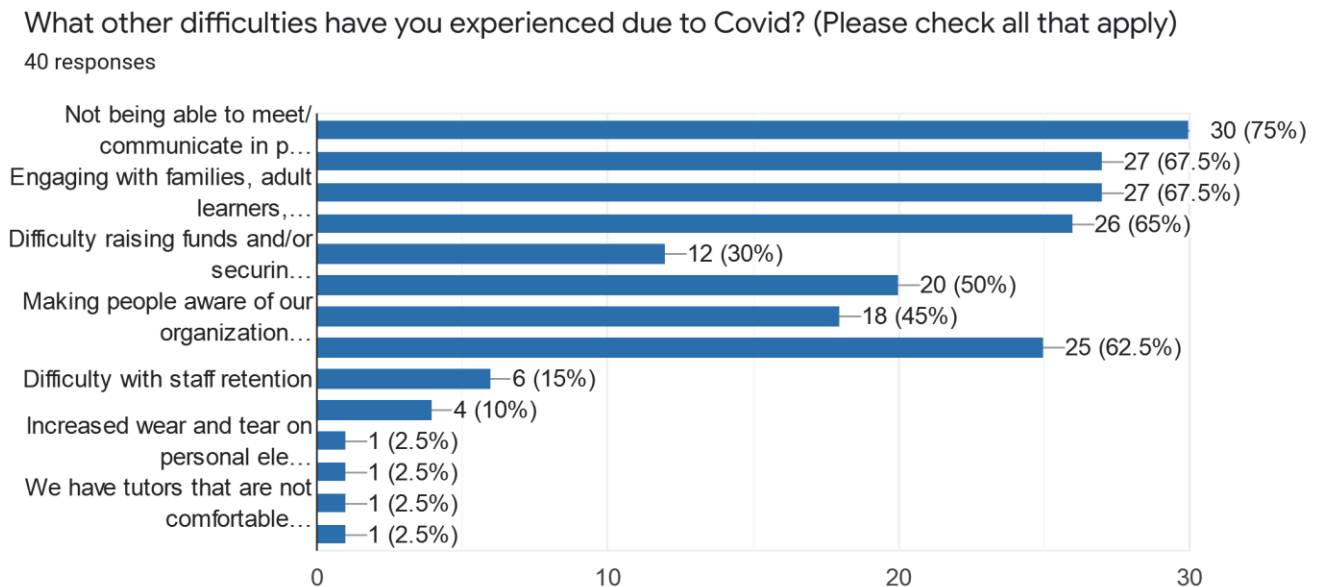
34 responses
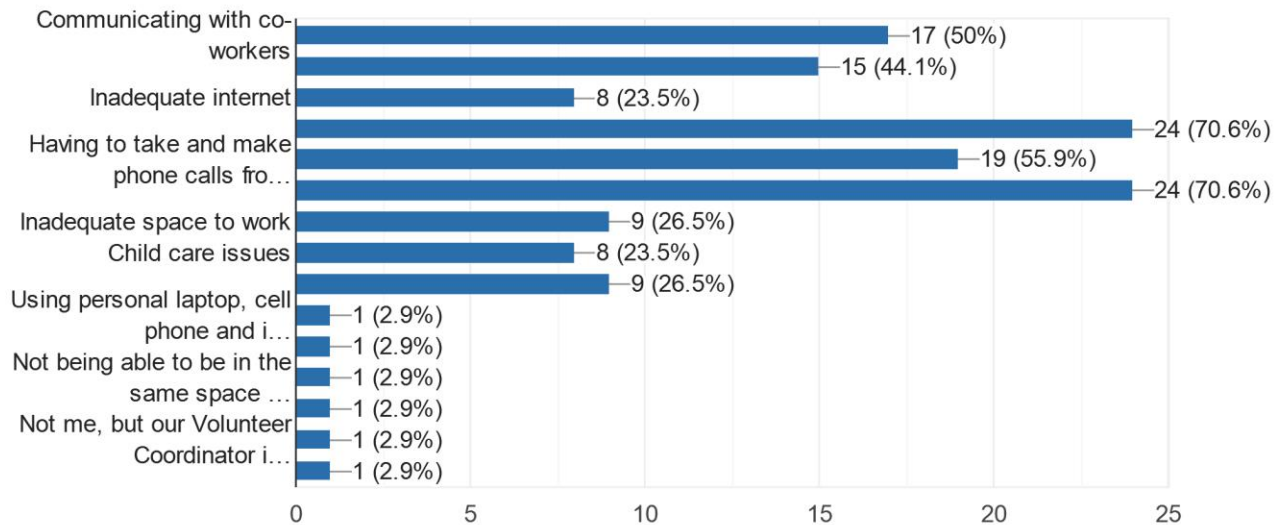
- Not having the same resources at home as they had in their original workplace: 71%
- Missing social connections: 71%
- Having to make phone calls from personal phones: 55.9%
- Communicating with coworkers: 50%

- Issues with technology: 44%
- Inadequate space to work: 27%
- Homeschooling children: 27%
- Inadequate internet: 24%
- Childcare issues: 24%

In the "other" option, one respondent said they had an issue contacting their students. Another mentioned how it was difficult to meet the needs of students and staff when they only had access to personal laptops and computers.

Q: What other difficulties have you experienced due to Covid? (Please check all that apply)

What other difficulties have you experienced due to Covid? (Please check all that apply)
40 responses

Not being able to meet/communicate in p…	30 (75%)
	27 (67.5%)
Engaging with families, adult learners,…	27 (67.5%)
	26 (65%)
Difficulty raising funds and/or securin…	12 (30%)
	20 (50%)
Making people aware of our organization…	18 (45%)
	25 (62.5%)
Difficulty with staff retention	6 (15%)
	4 (10%)
Increased wear and tear on personal ele…	1 (2.5%)
	1 (2.5%)
We have tutors that are not comfortable…	1 (2.5%)
	1 (2.5%)

- Not being able to meet/communicate in person: 75%
- Adapting programs to be delivered online: 68%
- Engaging with families, adult learners, etc.: 68%
- Increased cost due to PPE: 65%
- Adult learners, families or participants not having access to internet/technology: 63%
- Organizing events/programs in person with Covid restrictions: 50%
- Making people aware of the organization: 45%
- Difficulty raising funds and/or securing donations: 30%
- Difficulty with staff retention: 15%
- Difficulty volunteer retention: 10%

In the "other" option, one respondent said how their tutors are no longer comfortable working in person, despite the introduction of Covid restrictions. Another said how they are experiencing increased wear and tear on their personal electronics, as well as having the shoulder the burden of higher electricity costs due to working from home.

Q: What has been the main issue/challenge your organization/program has faced during Covid? (Long answer question)

Everyone gave a response for this question, but there were three main recurring themes throughout all the answers:

1. Having to adapt program(s) and/or services which are traditionally in person to be delivered online.
2. Some participants, particularly low income and rural participants, do not have adequate technology and/or internet to be able to access programs/materials online.
   a. It is also difficult to keep these people motivated and engaged in the program.
3. Families, learners and participants are still anxious about meeting in person even with Covid regulations and restrictions.

> *"Keeping our clients engaged in our programming has been very challenging. Many clients are keen to have our visits at home, but phone calls are less personable, and it is more challenging to deliver our program content."*

Many respondents also mentioned the loss of funds from cancelled events or reduced revenue due to having these events online. Some respondents said how, despite being able to have some in person programs back up and running, Covid restrictions have made things difficult with the increased need for PPE, new sanitizing procedures and having smaller groups participate at one time.

Q: Do you have any success stories or positives that you would like to share?

*Note: this was not a required question

Many respondents reported how their program was able to successfully transition to be delivered online, despite some challenges along the way. Many teachers, staff and participants have been acquiring new skills in technology due to the need to move everything online.

"Creativity and adaptation have defined us as an organization."

"We are currently supporting more families virtually than we ever did before."

"COVID forced the change in service delivery that was needed and unsuccessful for years."

"It's very positive to see [participants] feel more confident with technology."
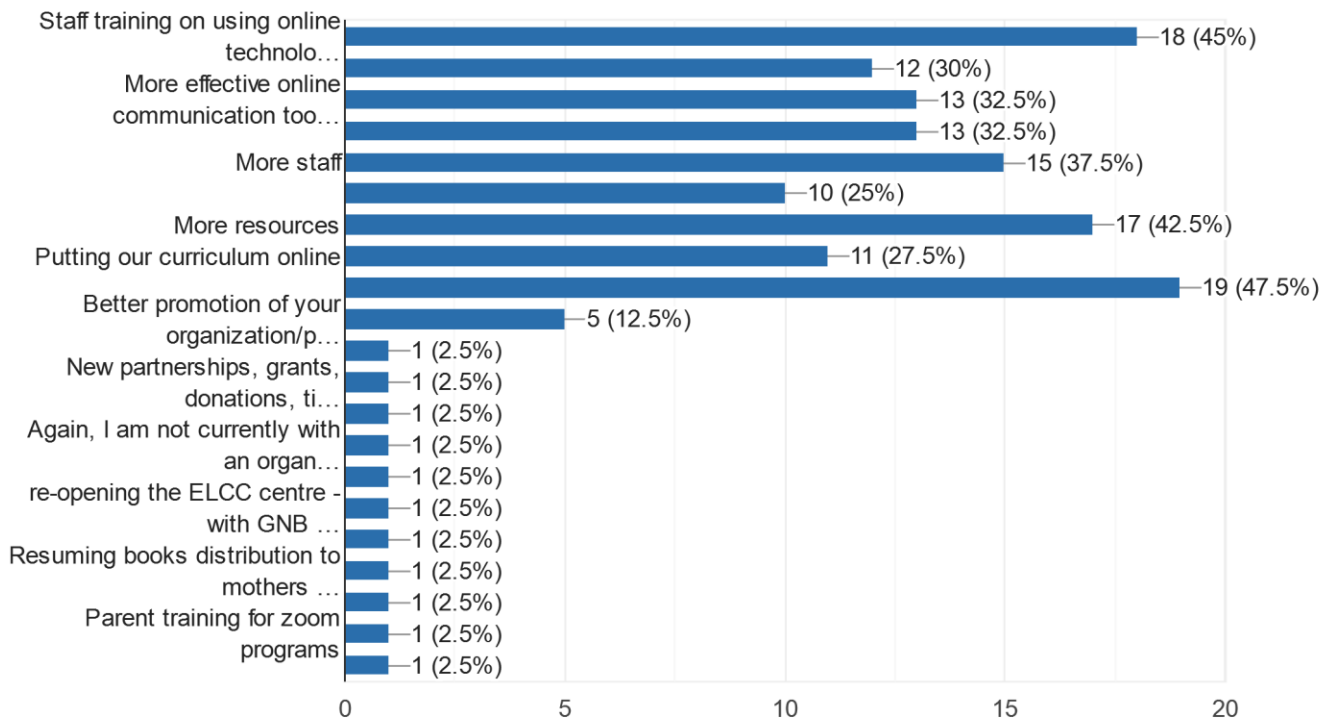
There is also a distinct feeling of pride in themselves and their staff, participants and learners for being able to adapt so quickly to this sudden change.

Q: What would help your organization during this time? (Please check all that apply)

What would help your organization/program during this time? (Please check all that apply)
40 responses

- Staff training on strategies for teaching online or leading webinars: 48%
- Staff training on using online technology: 45%
- More resources: 43%
- More staff: 38%
- More effective online communication tools: 33%
- Better promotion of the organization/program: 33%
- Better access to high speed internet: 30%
- Putting the curriculum online: 28%
- Help with recruitment of more participants in the program(s): 25%

In the "other" option, having parents trained for Zoom programs was mentioned. Another respondent said how more technology resources, like tablets, would greatly benefit long-term learners. New partnerships, grants and donations were also mentioned.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share about the impact of Covid on your organization/program? (Long answer question)

*Note: this was not a required question

Many respondents made comments about the difficulty of the situation, and how there have been many struggles for organizations to adapt. Some pointed out how Covid has forced organizations to become more modern, specifically with embracing online practices and technology.

However, many also commented on the hard work and resilience of their organizations and staff, as well as reaffirming the importance of their program(s) to the participants and/or learners. Some programs have been forced to shut down entirely, which is a great loss to the community.

Conclusions

The impact of Covid can be felt in many areas of the literacy sector in New Brunswick. There has been a greater demand on staff and volunteers to provide programs online, which has been a difficult transition. Despite this, many organizations have been successful after some trial and error. There are still many challenges ahead for organizations to be able to continue effectively and safely during the Covid pandemic. While moving online has brought some unexpected benefits, such as being able to reach a wider audience and increasing digital skills, it has also created barriers for those whose personal qualities or life circumstances make learning at home difficult.

Online learning and remote work have made many people miss the social connections they were previously used to, both with their fellow staff members/volunteers and learners. With their programs moved online, it has been more difficult for these organizations to engage their learners and participants. This difficulty has also impacted staff, volunteer and learner retention.

Recommendations

1. It is important to recognize the critical role of literacy program facilitators and volunteers and provide opportunities for ongoing professional learning and support. This would help reduce the stress and uncertainty that currently exists surrounding remote learning and help mitigate the issue of staff, volunteer and learner recruitment and retention.

2. Going forward, there needs to be an emphasis on digital literacy for learners, families, participants, and staff. This digital literacy would begin at the school level, but also needs to be available for staff and volunteers who are currently working in the literacy sector. This should include how to use programs such as Zoom, how to lead webinars and how to effectively teach online.

3. Digital literacy on its own isn't enough—these online services need to be available to everyone in New Brunswick. However, people living in rural or low-income areas often do not have access to reliable, high speed internet. Some low-income individuals and families also do not have access to computers or smart phones which would allow them to engage in online learning. These areas can no longer be ignored when it comes to technology or internet, something we have seen highlighted during the Covid pandemic.

4. Moving to online learning has limitations for those whose personal qualities or life circumstances make learning at home difficult. Ideally, a blended program with the option of in person time is necessary to help ensure equity and access for all.