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The impact of COVID-19 on library board governance:
An analysis of public library board meeting processes and participation in Canada in 2020

Subject keywords: Libraries, Emergency Management, Public engagement

Geographical keywords: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario

MPA Major Research Paper

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The impact of COVID-19 on library board governance: An analysis of public library board meeting processes and participation in Canada in 2020.

Abstract

In March 2020, provincial and municipal governments in Canada implemented measures to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, municipalities had to quickly transition to holding their public meetings in new ways. Some organizations moved to teleconference meetings, while others used videoconferencing software. Public libraries were no exception to this, and library boards began holding their public board meetings electronically. The aims of this study are threefold: First, to identify what methods were used to hold electronic public library board meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, second, to determine whether such methods resulted in a change in public participation, and third, to ascertain whether or not public libraries intend to continue holding meetings electronically after the pandemic is over. To achieve the objectives of this study, the results of a web survey that was distributed electronically to 631 public library systems across Canada have been analyzed. The survey findings indicate that public library began using electronic meeting formats in 2020, and that Zoom was the software most frequently implemented. The findings also indicate that while an increase in attendance by the general public was not reported, libraries did report an increase in the number of staff who attended board meetings. Finally, the findings indicate that about half of libraries in Canada have intentions to continue with some level of electronic participation as part of their board meetings after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

Subject keywords: Libraries, Emergency Management, Public engagement

Geographical keywords: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario

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Introduction

Public libraries in Canada provide valuable services to their residents and are often referred to as the “hubs” of their communities. For many members of the general public, the public library is a bit of a mystery – community members often don’t know how the library is connected to the municipality, or how they are governed. Nonetheless, public attitudes are largely positive about the library’s role in communities (Horrigan, 2016).

What matters most to community members is that library staff are available to help them with their information needs – residents are less interested in who the library board chair is and how board decisions are made. Despite lack of public understanding, board governance provides a vital foundation upon which all library services are founded. The purpose of this paper is to investigate board governance issues, as public libraries in Canada navigated the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges to the ways that public libraries provided services for their communities: library staff limited the amount of people allowed to gather, enforced the wearing of masks, introduced enhanced cleaning processes, started quarantining returned materials, and restricted access within (or to) their buildings (Tsicos, 2020). Above and beyond the challenges of providing services to patrons, library board governance was impacted as well. Many library administrators and board members were suddenly unable to hold their meetings in person, and yet still had to carry-out their governance duties and meet the requirements legislated by their respective Library Acts. This paper will attempt to capture some of the experiences reported by Canadian libraries, as they implemented electronic board meetings.

The broad research question this paper has endeavored to answer is: “What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the conduct of public library board meetings?” This question is addressed in a series of steps. First, the different ways that public library board meetings were held during the COVID-19 pandemic are identified and described. Second, whether the transition to electronic board meetings resulted in increased public attendance was investigated. Third, an analysis of whether libraries intend to continue with electronic participation after the COVID-19 pandemic is over was completed. This research paper reviews the data collected from an online survey, where respondents were asked questions about these topics, in an effort to address these questions.

The first part of the research question, which aims to describe how public libraries in Canada held electronic public board meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, originated with the simple observation that many public libraries were prevented from holding in-person board meetings in spring 2020. Most libraries had never held an online board meeting before, and a variety of tools were available to implement them. While each library system has unique needs and constraints, the general functions of public board meetings remain fairly consistent across library systems, making them ideal for comparison. The second part of the research question, determining the impact that this format had on public participation, begins with the hypothesis that the transition to electronic board meetings has had an impact on public participation. The reason being that a new method of access would have an effect on public behavior, resulting in either increased or decreased participation. The final part of the research question, with regards to how libraries intend

to hold public board meetings after the COVID-19 pandemic is over is still speculative at this point, because the pandemic is ongoing, but may result in useful information that can lead to best practices or assist library administrators with decision-making going forward.

These questions are relevant to the local government context because public libraries are governed by local boards, which are considered special purpose bodies legislated under the *Municipal Acts* of their respective provinces. This research is timely because the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in new government legislation around public gatherings which required local government organizations to change the way they provided service. Because of the recency of the ongoing pandemic, no prior research on this topic in Canada has occurred.

Context

Although the world began watching the evolution of a novel coronavirus originating in China in late 2019, the World Health Organization did not declare COVID-19 a pandemic until March 11, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2021). Later that same month, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Ontario also declared provincial states of emergency, as did many municipalities within these provinces (The Canadian Press, 2021). Each province implemented its own restrictions, which ranged from a complete closure of all essential services, to implementing mandatory quarantine periods upon entering the province. As a result, libraries across Canada saw impacts to their services in spring 2020; many libraries shut down services completely at that time, which, in some cases, resulted in layoffs (Bench, 2021). In the summer of 2020, Canadian provinces began resuming some

services and lifting certain restrictions. However, in the fall of 2020, a second wave of COVID-19 occurred, and provinces once again began imposing additional restrictions on services and businesses (The Canadian Press, 2021). Throughout the year, libraries continued to provide services, whether it meant operating with curbside pick-up, or with reduced hours, or with fewer services. At the same time, library board trustees continued to fulfill their governance duties and maintain the meeting requirements laid out in their respective Libraries Act legislation.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted municipalities in similar ways that it impacted public libraries. Municipal councils had to pivot quickly to providing online services and had to transition to holding their council meetings electronically as well. Despite the fact that many municipalities had prior experience streaming their council meetings live on the internet (something that that most library boards had never done before), the transition to online council meetings was even more complex, because several provinces required amendments to their Municipal Acts to allow for the implementation of all-virtual meetings. An example of this was in Ontario, when, in in March 2020, the Municipal Emergency Act, 2020 amended the Municipal Act, 2001 (Office of the Premier, 2020). It is worth noting that the Municipal Emergency Act, 2020 specifically excluded public library boards from this amendment, because unlike municipalities in Ontario, library boards had already been permitted to hold meetings electronically, based on earlier direction from the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries (Finnerty, 2020). Despite the fact that Ontario library boards were legally permitted to hold electronic public board

meetings prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this had not been the regular practice for a variety reasons, including availability of software technology, ensuring public access, cost, and accessibility concerns, among others. The data collected in this research paper makes it clear that the transition to electronic library board meetings that occurred in 2020 was the direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature review

COVID-19 and governance

Librarians and information professionals are uniquely prepared to oversee data collection and information sharing projects, and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, information was collected and compiled to help support data-driven decision-making across the country. The Ontario Library Association published the results of a survey they conducted in March and April 2020. The survey was completed by public libraries in Ontario and the responses indicate how libraries responded and adapted to the period of closure legislated by the provincial government (Ontario Library Association, 2020). This report indicated whether library staff were working from home, had been redeployed or laid off, inquired about services being provided during the closure, as well as the tools being used to facilitate the virtual environment. Similarly, the Manitoba Library Association conducted a survey in May 2020, to identify service trends and governance issues among their library systems. Of particular interest, results indicated that only seven libraries in Manitoba had business continuity plans (13% of total) and that public libraries were keeping in regular contact with their boards (39% kept in touch a minimum of once per week, while 44% had

communications at least monthly) (Manitoba Library Association, 2020). These surveys demonstrate that public libraries in Canada began using new tools as they shifted to increased online services, and that ongoing board governance issues remained top-of-mind during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outside of the library sector, the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario responded to the pandemic by publishing a guide for Ontario municipalities on how to run electronic board meetings (AMCTO, 2020). This document outlined recommended best practices for adapting to amendments to the Municipal Act due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the guide explains legislative and technological considerations, discusses connectivity and accessibility issues, etiquette, electronic participation, and provides case studies. The Alberta Government provided similar support to municipalities with regards to holding meetings during the pandemic. These guidelines explicitly included instructions for local boards and identified that meetings were permitted to be held electronically, provided notice was given to the public, and the public was able to hear the meeting and make submissions (Government of Alberta, 2020). The support provided to municipalities in Canada certainly influenced library board governance procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the close relationship that library boards have with local municipalities.

In addition to municipal support, many provincial and professional library associations produced guidelines to assist libraries as they began to resume services in the summer and

fall of 2020, when legislated restrictions were lessened. In Ontario, these guidelines were produced by the Southern Ontario Library Service and included information to assist library boards with governance issues (Southern Ontario Library Service, 2020). Other guidelines included those created by the British Columbia Library Trustees Association, which emphasized that “governance practices and behaviors needed during the time of COVID-19 are the same as during any other time” (British Columbia Library Trustees Association, 2020). Specifically, they recommended following guidance from the British Columbia Government with regards to electronic meetings, which stipulated that boards must communicate changes to meeting approaches with the public, make best efforts to follow existing procedures to allow members of the public to be heard, and explore technology that will enable the public to hear and watch the meeting (British Columbia, 2020).

These examples indicate that issues regarding governance were of concern to library administrators, and that libraries in each respective province received support and guidance from their associations. Overall, while many libraries had no previous experience with electronic board meeting governance, a good deal of support was available throughout the transition, from survey findings, professional associations, and government organizations. This support will have affected the ways that libraries responded to these governance challenges, which is one aspect covered in the online survey discussed in the following pages.

Open and closed meetings

Public libraries, governed by local boards, are held to the same standards as municipalities when it comes to governance issues such as open and closed public meetings. There has been a fair amount written about government meetings, and the importance of holding open public meetings, and in fact several recent articles discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic explicitly. In October 2020, an article by Rankin discussed the topic of public meetings being held electronically via livestream during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the risk of the livestream failing, resulting in a public that can no longer attend. The article quotes David Siegel, who clarifies that when the public is not able to attend an open meeting, the meeting effectively becomes private. The article also identifies that Ontario's Ombudsman has been reviewing cases where municipalities have had issues with electronic meetings and public attendance (Rankin, 2020). Accordingly, the Ontario Ombudsman's website provides guidance to local governments with information on requirements and guidelines surrounding open and closed meetings. The documentation includes public library boards and describes the processes for filing and handling complaints from the public (Ombudsman Ontario, n.d.). Because library board meetings must comply with closed vs. open meeting legislation, they faced the same challenges as municipalities, during the transition to electronic meetings in 2020.

Moving beyond the Canadian context, several articles were written in the United States in 2020 on the topic of holding open meetings in a virtual environment due to COVID-19.

Articles by Tomasic and Pressgrove both discuss the logistical challenges that local

governments faced as they pivoted quickly to running virtual open meetings (2020). Articles by Davis and Dow Jones Institutional News explain that public access to open meetings is crucial, and report that some municipalities were able to implement solutions faster than others (2020). An article by Garcia highlights the fact that many municipalities decided to implement different solutions to ensure that their meetings were accessible to the public; a variety of options from social media livestreaming, teleconferences, and video conferencing software were highlighted (2020). This research paper specifically investigated the different tools that libraries used for their electronic meetings, and while the findings generally aligned with Garcia, there was a clear preference in terms of platform used by libraries in Canada.

Public engagement and advocacy

Regardless of the solution used to implement electronic meetings, it is clear that the ways that the public interacted with open meetings changed in 2020. An article by Labosier discusses this, and whether the rapid shift to electronic participation due to COVID-19 could end up resulting in a reform of public engagement at the local level. The author stresses that building trust with the community is key and hypothesizes that local governments that implement electronic tools may end up creating new dialogue with citizens (Labosier, 2020). A key aspect of library board governance is the transparency and accountability that comes with holding public meetings in such a way that they are accessible to community members, It is obvious that the rapid shift to online meetings came with challenges, and different local government organizations, including libraries,

implemented different tools to ensure that their meetings were accessible, even when they could not be held in-person.

Use of technology resulted in community members interacting with public meetings differently, and one can imagine that this had an impact on public engagement. For some, online meetings may have been an improvement to access, but for others, this could have been a barrier. An article by Nabatchi and Blomgren Amsler discusses the fact that the umbrella term “public engagement” is not very well described, even though it is widely accepted that engaging with the community can be a positive influence in local governance. The authors explain how this lack of clear description results in fragmented research and leaves practitioners unsure of how to improve their public engagement practices (2014, 63S). The authors describe how political culture impacts the success of public participation and references a study that found that “close attention to the design of the participatory system and its processes” was key to holding successful engagement activities (Nabatchi et al., 2014, 69S). It is vital for local government organizations, including libraries, to ensure that the tools they use and the processes they follow during a public meeting are conducive and accessible, otherwise they will not result in meaningful participation.

Moreover, an article by Goulding describes how, in the United Kingdom, local government organizations have been leveraging libraries as spaces that are ideal for citizen involvement. The author highlights that this is because public libraries are often seen as being “the heart of the community” (2008, 40). Goulding goes further, and explains that

community involvement in board decision-making is crucial, and that consultation and communication with the public results in stronger governance decisions made at the library board level (2008, 47).

Building off of the article by Goulding, an article by Simmons and Oliver describes the importance of library board trustees taking on active roles as community connectors (2012, 24). The article explains that while library administrators are expected to be “competent and expert” in operating a library system, a trustee should be providing support by engaging stakeholders and getting involved in civic conversation (2012, 24). The authors go further and explain that engaged library trustees should be “capable of eliciting influence and change”. Simmons and Oliver’s article highlights the unique and key role that library board trustees play when it comes to public engagement and advocating for library services. This implies that boards with engaged trustees are an important aspect of library governance. This is one reason why it was crucial (beyond simply meeting legislated requirements) for library administrators to support their trustees as they implemented electronic methods of holding their meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring engaged and effective board trustees results in stronger advocacy, public engagement, and decision-making.

An article by McClure, Feldman, and Ryan takes this idea further, and discusses the topic of public library advocacy in a political environment. In an effort to link successful libraries to politics and advocacy, the authors ask an interesting question: “Who are the supporters of

the library and to what degree are they part of the political process in the community? Can they become more active and successful in that political process?" (McClure et al., 2006, 146). The authors speculate that considering these questions can assist a library as it develops a plan for political engagement. They state that the answers to these questions could be elected officials, municipal partners, community organizations, or even residents. It is important to remember that residents can be key political players and that it is important to keep them informed and engaged. Ensuring that board meetings are accessible to the public – even in an online environment – is particularly important, and library boards across Canada were able to accomplish this during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Internet access in Canada

The fact that public meetings are a core aspect of effective governance and have important implications on public engagement has been discussed. While public libraries in Canada transitioned to electronic meeting formats in 2020, the fact remains that electronic meetings present unique challenges and barriers to those participating. One key challenge that must be discussed is access to reliable internet in Canada. There is a clear disparity between internet services in urban areas, compared to rural areas. According to the Canadian Internet Registration Authority, in March 2020, the median download speed in rural areas was about 5.42 Mbps, which was much lower than the median 26.16 Mbps in cities. This disparity increased significantly throughout the course of the pandemic, because in March 2021, the median speed in cities grew to 51.09 Mbps, compared to about 9.74 Mbps in rural areas (Canadian Internet Registration Authority, 2021). This is of

particular importance because many public libraries provide services in rural and remote municipalities. According to an article by Carra, in many rural communities, a common internet setup is called “fixed-wireless”. This is a cost-effective solution because it does not require the costs of installing wires or cables to every home. However, this sort of network does result in increased disruptions to service, especially during periods of high use (Carra, 2020). The author goes on to describe how 16% of Canadian households do not have access to the internet at home, and when you isolate only the rural areas, that number can grow to 63% (Carra, 2020). This presents a significant “digital divide” and as workplaces shifted to online services and work-from-home arrangements during the pandemic, this inequality only increased. As the results of this research paper are reviewed in the following pages, the issue of reliable internet access will be further highlighted. While the transition to electronic board meetings may have been smooth in urban areas with good internet access, we must consider the barriers faced by those systems in rural areas.

Research methodology

Definition of terms

- Public libraries are governed by a library act — provincial legislation designed to outline governance, functional duties, and purposes of public libraries (Wilson, n.d.).
- Governing boards of trustees have both legal and fiduciary responsibilities. These fiduciary responsibilities extend to duty of due care, duty of obedience, and duty of loyalty (American Library Association, 2014)

- Public board meetings are defined as meetings of the board of trustees that are required to be public as per provincial and municipal legislation (Ottawa Public Library, 2020).

Data collection

An online survey was selected as the instrument of choice for this research paper and was administered the same way to all participants. The survey was comprised of 23 questions, and the data collection period was four weeks. The survey was sent to the email address of either the head administrator (CEO, Director, Chief Librarian, etc.) or, if that was not publicly available, then the general inquiries email address was used. The survey was emailed initially, and then three reminder emails were sent over the course of the collection period (only to those who had not yet completed the survey). The online survey software Qualtrics was used to create and distribute the survey and to collect the data. As per a research ethics proposal approved by Western's Research Ethics Board, no personal or institutional data was collected, and all participants remained anonymous. Survey responses were exported to both Excel and Jamovi for analysis. Appendix A includes the survey questions, while Appendix B includes the survey results.

Identification of participants

There were two criteria for inclusion in the study:

- A. The library system had to be located in the one of the following provinces:
Alberta (222 library systems), British Columbia (71 library systems),

Manitoba (54 library systems), Nova Scotia (9 library systems), and Ontario (316 library systems).

- B. The library system had to have a publicly available email address: Alberta (212 library systems), British Columbia (71 library systems), Manitoba (44 library systems), Nova Scotia (8 library systems), and Ontario (296 library systems).

Criterion A was selected because each of these five provinces requires annual reporting of statistics and information to the Ministry, and each of these provinces makes this data publicly available on the Ministries' websites. Moreover, libraries within those five provinces are governed under similar Library Act legislation. Those provinces which were excluded either do not have the same annual reporting requirements (i.e. the governments of Quebec and Saskatchewan do not publish annual lists with the contact information of all library systems in the province) or have different governance models (the Territories, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island have library systems that are governed by different models, including provincial systems and committee governance).

Criterion B was selected because an email address was required so that the survey instrument could be sent to the organization. The email addresses were identified and compiled through a combination of reviewing the above-mentioned provincial Ministry reports, as well as by looking at the websites of the library systems whose email addresses were not included in the annual reporting.

Because this research paper is concerned with library board of trustee meetings specifically, this survey limited respondents to only those which operate with a board of trustees. To accomplish this, the first question of the survey asks the respondent whether their library system is governed by a library board. If the respondent selected “No”, then the survey thanked them for their time and ended. This ensured that the data collected by the survey compared only systems with similar governance models.

Survey limitations

The survey has several limitations. One limitation is that no question in the survey was mandatory and many participants did not answer all the questions (resulting in some questions having more responses than others). Another limitation is that the survey relied on participant self-reporting to gather data (in which participants could have responded with inaccurate information). Self-reporting via online survey was necessary for this research, because the alternative (interviewing hundreds of library managers as well as reviewing their administrative documentation) was not possible within the constraints of this research, which had no funding and limited time availability.

Findings and discussion

This section presents a descriptive overview of the survey responses.

Characteristics of responding libraries

A wide range of responses were received from all provinces, representing library systems of many different sizes. Table 1 shows the geographic distribution of responses and response rates, by province. This data was collected in question 22, and the responses show that a majority of responding library systems were in Ontario (53%), with Alberta (29%) and British Columbia (12%) accounting for most of the rest. The overall response rate was high at 49%. Ontario had the highest response rate, at 55% while Manitoba had the lowest, at 32%.

Table 1: Distribution of responses and response rates, by province

Province	Responses (n)	Responses (%)	# of libraries emailed	Response rate (%)
AB	90	29%	212	43%
BC	37	12%	71	52%
MB	14	5%	44	32%
NS	4	1%	8	50%
ON	163	53%	296	55%
TOTAL	308	100%	631	49%

Table 2 shows the population size of library service areas, which was captured in question 23. The responses ranged from 200 residents to 1,000,000 residents. To facilitate analysis, this data was divided into bins containing similar numbers of cases while retaining intuitive breakpoints between bins:

Table 2: Population size of library service areas

Bin #	Population Description	Frequency
1	< 2,500	46
2	2,500-4,999	39
3	5,000-9,999	34
4	10,000-14,999	32
5	15,000-29,999	33
6	30,000-99,999	34
7	> 99,999	39
	Total:	257

We see that many respondents work at libraries that serve smaller communities, with 59% of respondents reporting that they serve a community of fewer than 15,000 people. Only 15% of respondents reported working at systems serving over 100,000 residents.

Reasons for shifting to electronic meetings

A key place to begin this discussion is by examining the reasons why library boards transitioned to holding their meetings electronically. Table 3 shows the responses from question 16, which asked the respondent to identify the reason why the library had to begin conducting electronic meetings in 2020. Respondents from Alberta and British Columbia provided similar responses, where “Directive from public health unit” was identified most frequently, and “Provincial Regulation” was the second most common reason. Conversely, respondents from Manitoba and Ontario presented different results, with the majority choosing “Provincial Regulation” first, and “Directive from public health unit” as the second most-frequently selected choice.

Table 3: Reasons for shifting to electronic meetings, by province

	Municipal bylaw		Libraries Act		Municipal Act		Provincial Regulation		Directive from P.H.U.		Directive from council		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
AB	8	7%	2	2%	1	1%	44	40%	49	44%	7	6%	111
BC	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	18	40%	24	53%	3	7%	45
MB	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	10	50%	8	40%	2	10%	20
NS	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%	2
ON	12	4%	3	1%	1	0%	108	40%	101	37%	46	17%	271
TOTAL	20	4%	5	1%	2	0%	180	40%	184	41%	58	13%	449

Overall, respondents indicated that both restrictions from the provincial government and recommendations from the public health unit were the main reasons for implementing this change. In some provinces, it is worth noting that the public health unit refers to a provincial entity (i.e. Alberta) while in others, the public health authorities are municipal (i.e. Ontario). Some respondents commented that it was board trustee preference that impacted their decision to hold meetings electronically, when they were able to hold meetings in-person because they could conform to gathering limitations, distancing requirements, and other mandated safety measures.

Electronic board meetings

Questions 3 and 7 asked respondents to identify any differences in the quantity of meetings held in 2019 compared to 2020. Library administrators in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario reported holding fewer Board meetings in 2020, when compared to 2019. The only province to report differently was Nova Scotia, when respondents indicated no change.

In Ontario, this decrease may not be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, because in December 2019, the Ontario provincial government made a change to the Public Libraries Act and reduced the total number of required meetings to seven, down from ten (Finnerty, 2019). The responses received from library administrators located in Ontario clearly reflects this legislative change. However, other provinces did not see any changes to their legislation, and nonetheless reported holding fewer meetings in 2020. In fact, each province has a different minimum number of meetings outlined in their respective Libraries Acts. In Alberta, the Libraries Act stipulates that the board meet at least once every four months (Public Library Services Branch, 2016, p. 9). In both British Columbia (Library Act, 1996) and Manitoba (Manitoba Public Library Services Branch, n.d. p.1), the Library Acts set the minimum number of meetings per year as six, while the Nova Scotia Libraries Act does not stipulate a minimum number of meetings at all (Libraries Act, 1990). The responses received from respondents in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia generally reflect their respective province's minimum requirements.

On average, respondents indicated that 69% of board meetings held in 2020 were held electronically. Table 4 shows the data collected from questions 7 and 8. These responses determined how many meetings were held in 2020, and of those, how many were electronic.

Table 4: Shifting to electronic meetings in 2020

Province	Electronic only - Median	Total meetings - Median	% electronic of total
AB	5	8	63%
BC	6	9	67%
MB	4	6	67%
NS	2.5	3.5	71%
ON	7	9	78%

The province that reported the highest number of electronic meetings in 2020 was Ontario, with respondents indicating that 78% of their meetings were held online. The province with the fewest electronic meetings was Alberta, with respondents indicating that 63% were. These findings are not surprising, considering that each province enacted legislation with different restrictions, at different times throughout 2020. As well, it is worth noting that, as mentioned before, Alberta is required only to have a minimum of four meetings per year, compared to Ontario's seven, which further explains these findings.

Some respondents indicated that they needed to amend their library board bylaws to reflect the implementation of electronic meetings, for example, the Procedure By-law. Close to 55% of respondents indicated that they did not find it difficult to transition to electronic meetings, while the remaining 45% indicated that they did find it difficult, or at least did initially. Library associations across Canada provided support to library administrators and trustees, to help offset these difficulties. The British Columbia Library Trustees Association endorsed the guidelines developed by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, which provided direction with regards to holding meetings electronically (Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2020). As well, the Alberta Library Trustees Association held instructional webinars to assist trustees navigating through governance issues during the Covid-19 pandemic (Alberta Library Trustees Association, 2020).

Respondents were also asked to identify which electronic meeting tools they used to hold their meetings. Tables 5 and 6 show that Zoom was the most popular choice in Alberta,

British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario. Interestingly, in Nova Scotia, the results were split 50/50, with half respondents using Zoom and the other half using telephone.

Table 5: Software used to conduct electronic meetings

	Never used	Used at least once	Used exclusively
Conference call via phone	65	29	7
Zoom	19	31	175
WebEx	71	6	8
Google Meet	71	5	5
Microsoft Teams	63	10	14
Skype	72	5	1
Other	58	11	10

Table 6: Software used to conduct electronic meetings

	Zoom		Phone		WebEx		Google		Teams		Skype		Other		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
AB	59	28%	28	13%	23	11%	25	12%	25	12%	24	11%	28	13%	212
BC	31	31%	14	14%	13	13%	11	11%	13	13%	11	11%	8	8%	101
MB	10	21%	7	15%	6	13%	6	13%	7	15%	6	13%	6	13%	48
NS	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4
ON	123	33%	50	13%	43	12%	39	11%	42	11%	37	10%	37	10%	371
Total	225	31%	101	14%	85	12%	81	11%	87	12%	78	11%	79	11%	736

Paying close attention to Zoom, we can see that 65% of respondents who indicated having used a software a minimum of one time selected Zoom as one that they tried, while only 5% of respondents who indicated having not tried a software at all selected Zoom.

Table 7 captures the results from question 13, which asked respondents to identify any other software that was used during electronic meetings, but which were not listed in question 12. This was an open-ended question, and so common themes had to be identified.

25 responses were received for this question, and 14 common themes were identified.

Findings indicate that GoToMeeting software was the most popular software used by respondents who answered this question.

Table 7: Other software responses

Name of software	# of times mentioned
GoToMeeting	9
Livestreamed to social media	3
Email	3
GoToConnect	1
Phone	1
Callbridge	1
Facetime	1
Hybrid in-person and Zoom	1
Messenger chat	1
Jitsi	1
Pragmatic conferencing	1
GlobalMeet	1
Unsure	1

While Zoom was reported as the most popular choice overall, it is clear that library systems used a variety of options. Several respondents of question 13 indicated that they used GoToMeeting, which had been provided to them by the Alberta Public Library Services Branch. That software option had not been listed in question 12, which is why respondents identified it separately. In the comments collected for question 13, the cost of software was mentioned several times as well, indicating a financial barrier to software selection. A few respondents reported that they used the free version of Zoom and had to create multiple meeting links in the event that their board meeting ran longer than the allocated 40 minutes of free service.

However, cost was not the most frequently reported challenge with regards to running electronic board meetings. Table 8 shows the results collected from question 14, which captured the challenges that were experienced while conducting electronic board meetings. When looking at all provinces combined, the challenge most often experienced was “Trustee difficulty with the software”, followed closely by “Connectivity difficulties” as the second-most reported challenge. However, when looking at the data split by province, Ontario respondents indicated that they experienced “Connectivity difficulties” slightly more often than they experienced “Trustee difficulty with the software”. Although the survey included a range of potential challenges, very few respondents reported frequent (often/most of the time) issues other than the two previously identified.

Table 8: Challenges encountered Often/Most of the time

Challenge	AB	BC	MB	NS	ON	ALL
Board trustees having difficulty with software	47%	38%	55%	50%	36%	40%
Administrators having difficulty with the software	7%	3%	9%	0%	3%	4%
Public attendees having difficulty with the software	4%	11%	0%	50%	2%	4%
Unable to meet accessibility needs of an attendee	5%	0%	9%	0%	3%	3%
Unruly/disrespectful public attendees	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	1%
Network/Connectivity issues	41%	34%	36%	0%	40%	39%
Cost of software	7%	3%	30%	0%	12%	10%

Table 9 shows the results of question 15, which asked respondents to identify what other challenges were encountered, which had not been captured in question 14. An open-ended question, 102 responses were received for this question, and 11 themes were identified. Poor connectivity was identified as the greatest challenge, followed closely by trustee difficulty with technology. These results are in-line with question 14, which identify those same issues as the top two biggest challenges faced when administering electronic

meetings. Fewer than 5% of respondents indicated that they had challenges dealing with unruly public attendees, or meeting accessibility needs.

Table 9: Other challenges reported

Theme	# times mentioned
Poor connectivity	28
Poor trustee technology skills	25
Administrative challenges	14
Reduced trustee engagement	11
Lack of socialization/networking	11
Inadequate computer equipment	9
Discussion does not flow easily	9
Distractions during meetings	4
Zoom fatigue	4
Cost of software	3
Poor public engagement	1

When analyzing the comments in the survey, an interesting theme that emerged was that several respondents reported reduced trustee engagement, “Zoom fatigue”, and a lack of socialization and networking as a result of the move to electronic meetings. Without an opportunity to have followed-up with an interview with the respondents, it is hard to understand the complexity of the reasons why this has been reported. Nonetheless, it is obvious that internet access and trustee skill with technology were the most often encountered challenges. Going forward, additional training and orientation for library board trustees may help combat some of the challenges with regards to their technological abilities, but the broader issue of access to reliable Internet is more complex. In November 2020, the federal government announced an investment of \$1.75 billion to help connect Canadians to high-speed Internet across the country. The aim of this investment is to connect 98 per cent of Canadians to high-speed Internet by 2026, with the goal of

connecting all Canadians by 2030 (Government of Canada, 2020). This investment should promote digital inclusion in rural and remote areas and enhance access and reliability of internet services in Canada.

Impact on public participation

Considering the impact of transitioning to electronic meetings, as described above, the next area of analysis is to determine how these changes impacted public participation, if at all.

Overall, respondents reported fewer public attendees at their meetings in 2020 compared to 2019. Table 10 shows to responses from questions 4 and 9, compared. These questions aimed to identify any differences between 2019 and 2020, with regards to the question:

“What was the LARGEST number of public attendees who attended any single board meeting?”. Overall, respondents indicated that the largest number of attendees of a single meeting was fewer in 2020, when compared to 2019.

Table 10: Difference in largest public attendance, 2019 and 2020

Largest # attendees	2019	2020
< 5	92%	96%
5 to 10	6%	4%
> 10	2%	0%

Specifically, 8% of respondents indicated that the largest number of attendees at a board meeting in 2019 was more than 5 people. Comparatively, only 4% indicated the same in 2020. Table 11 shows the differences between 2019 and 2020, with regards to employee attendance of board meetings, rather than members of the general public. Respondents reported having more staff members attend board meetings in 2020, compared to 2019.

Table 11: Difference in typical employee attendance, 2019 and 2020

Typical # staff	2019	2020
< 5	93%	90%
5 to 10	6%	9%
> 10	1%	1%

Specifically, 7% of respondents reported that in 2019, a typical board meeting would see more than 5 employees in attendance, and this figure increased to 10% in 2020. This shows that while public attendance decreased in 2020, staff member attendance increased.

Because this research attempted to answer the question has electronic meetings impacted participation, the survey delved deeper, and asked respondents to indicate the value of having public attendees, compared to staff attendees. Looking at the results, 30% of respondents indicated that it was very valuable to have staff attend board meetings, while only 8% reported the same for members of the general public. Overall, library administrators find it more important to have staff attend Board meetings than members of the public. Taken together, this data indicates that not only do library administrators see value in staff attending public board meetings but shows a positive shift in employee attendance in 2020, when electronic meeting formats were introduced.

Based on the findings of this survey alone, it is impossible to understand the reasons why more employees attended board meetings in 2020 compared to 2019. It could have been because of the shift to electronic meetings – perhaps employees found it more convenient to attend a board meeting online, rather than attend in-person. However, it could also have been because of the content of the meetings – perhaps service plans and usage statistics related to the COVID-19 pandemic were being discussed at the board level, and employees were interested in observing the trustees' conversations. A valuable addition to this

research would have been to survey library employees who attended electronic board meetings, to understand their motivation.

Library boards are certainly not the only organizations tracking attendance of public meetings. The City of St. Catherines for example, reported an increase in public views of their council meetings since implementing electronic meetings in 2020, due to the pandemic (Legal Clerks and Services, 2020). It is worth noting that “views” included instances of viewing after the live meeting was concluded. The survey conducted as part of this research asked specifically about attendance at a live meeting, but an area for future consideration could be to tack post-meeting views, as well. This is of particular interest, because in response to question 20, which asked about plan for future implementation, several respondents referred to livestreaming and using social media to broadcast their meetings, as well as making recording of their videos available after the fact. It will be interesting to see, in the coming years, whether this sort of model will be implemented by public libraries, and if so, it is possible that their public reach will increase. While attending a public meeting electronically may be more convenient for some (no need to travel, for example), having the ability to watch a public meeting after the fact could be even more convenient, because the viewer can access the content on their own time. This could result in more members of the public engaging with public meetings and being more informed about governance and service decisions.

Plans for future implementation

One particularly significant finding is that 48% of respondents indicated that they have plans to continue to incorporate aspects of electronic meetings after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. Table 12 shows these results by province. While slightly more library administrators responded that they had no plans to integrate electronic participation after the COVID-19 pandemic is over, this result was not consistent when comparing by province. More library administrators in Ontario and British Columbia responded that they did have plans to integrate electronic participation going forward. Conversely, in Alberta and Manitoba, more respondents indicated they would not. Once again, Nova Scotia presented different results, with a clear 50/50 split. When the data was analyzed by population served (as shown in Table 13), it becomes clear that libraries serving larger communities were more likely to report plans to implement electronic participation in the future, while respondents serving smaller communities were less likely to report that.

Table 12: Plans to incorporate online participation afterwards, by province

	AB		BC		MB		NS		ON		All Provinces	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	26	39%	19	58%	4	31%	1	50%	73	52%	123	48%
No	40	61%	14	42%	9	69%	1	50%	67	48%	131	52%
Tota	66	100%	33	100%	13	100%	2	100%	140	100%	254	100%

Table 13: Plans to incorporate online participation afterwards, by population

Bin	Population	Yes	No	Total	% Y	% N
1	< 2,500	14	38	52	27%	73%
2	2,500-4,999	14	22	36	39%	61%
3	5,000-9,999	15	16	31	48%	52%
4	10,000-14,999	19	13	32	59%	41%
5	15,000-29,999	15	16	31	48%	52%
6	30,000-99,999	20	14	34	59%	41%
7	> 99,999	23	15	38	61%	40%

Of those who indicated that they did have plans to continue incorporating electronic participation, question 20 asked respondents to provide additional details (Table 14). This was an open-ended question, and so common themes had to be identified. 112 responses were received for this question, and six themes were identified. The majority of responses (58%), indicated that the library plans on either using a hybrid model, or simply having the electronic version available as needed rather than maintaining electronic participation only, for example.

Table 14: How electronic participation might be integrated

Theme	# times mentioned
Already offered before, will continue to offer electronic post-pandemic	7
Expect a hybrid blend of electronic and in-person meetings going forward. Some answers included reasoning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 mentioned distance as a barrier; • 2 mentioned winter weather conditions as a barrier and ; • 1 mentioned increased participation in 2020 while offering electronic. 	27
Electronic option available as needed	31
Plan to livestream online / on social media	7
Plans to move ahead with electronic meetings post-pandemic. Some answers included reasoning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 mentioned winter weather conditions as a barrier and; • 3 mentioned increased participation in 2020 while offering electronic. 	19
Unsure	21

Several responses (6%) indicated that their library system had already incorporated electronic participation prior to the pandemic and would continue to do so after as well. Another 6% of responses indicated that they had plans only to livestream their in-person meetings, going forward. Interestingly, 19% of respondents who answered question 20 indicated that they planned to maintain full electronic board meetings moving forward, with several respondents specifically mentioning travel distance and weather conditions as barriers to in-person meetings.

Areas for future research

This research has demonstrated that public libraries in Canada implemented a variety of methods to run public board meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic and identified that approximately half of libraries intend on maintaining some sort of electronic participation options after the pandemic is over. Future research could be done to better understand public participation at board meetings – perhaps those libraries that did report an increase in public attendance while running electronic board meetings employed methods such as advertising, that those other library systems that did not see an increase in public attendance did not utilize. Building on this, future research could also focus on how public board meetings are promoted and advertised, and whether that promotion results in increased citizen engagement.

Another area for future research could be to wait several years after the COVID-19 pandemic is over and complete a study to determine whether public libraries ended up

implementing electronic participation options into their board meeting processes, like half reported they would. It is one thing for a respondent to indicate that they have plans to do something, and quite another to follow-through on implementing that plan. It would be interesting to see whether the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on public boards meetings resulted in any long-term changes.

Concluding remarks

There is no question that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted workplaces and work processes in the public sector to an extreme degree in 2020, and public libraries in Canada were no exception. Beyond impacting the services that libraries could provide to their communities, there were governance implications as well. This research has focused on what impact the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had on the governance of public library board meetings in Canada and has resulted in some key findings. The responses to the survey indicated that an average of 69% of library board meetings were held electronically, and that Zoom was the preferred software used. This research has shown that although no significant increase in public attendance was reported, library administrators do value staff attendance, which was reported to have increased in 2020. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, about half of respondents indicated that they had intentions to maintain some sort of electronic participation after the pandemic is over.

Effective governance is a key aspect of library board administration, and trustee engagement is vital to a library board's success (Urban Libraries, n.d.). Findings collected as part of this study demonstrate that while some library systems in Canada were able to transition to electronic meetings easily, with few issues, and saw benefits to this model (such as increased trustee engagement), that was not the case for all libraries. Many libraries reported difficulties and did not experience the benefits of this electronic model. The fact that one of the largest challenges reported was a lack of consistent or reliable Internet access demonstrates that Canada still has much work to do to reduce the "digital divide" and must continue to invest in policies and projects that work towards digital inclusion. Particularly telling is that respondents from smaller communities were less likely to report future plans that incorporate electronic participation, while respondents from larger communities were more likely to indicate that they have plans to do so.

Although the findings of this research are not enough to imply causation, it does beg the question of whether the higher rate of poor internet connectivity in smaller communities could be impacting the decision to move forward with an electronic meeting format in the future. When the data was analyzed by population served, it became clear that libraries serving larger communities were more likely to report plans to implement electronic participation in the future, and these larger systems faced fewer internet connectivity issues, compared to smaller rural libraries. Regardless, this research has demonstrated that public libraries in Canada were able to overcome the challenges they faced, continued to implement effective governance practices, support their communities in new ways,

embrace online service models, and fulfill their mandates. In a year filled with challenges, this is something the profession should be proud of.

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Appendix A – Survey instrument

Q0 Consent: I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q1 Does your library system hold regularly scheduled public meetings for a governing board (i.e. Board of directors, Board of trustees)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q2 On a scale from 0 to 10, how important is it to have the following groups attend library board meetings?

	Not at all important						Very important	
	0	1	3	4	6	7	9	10
Members of the public ()								
Library staff ()								

Consider your library system's regular public board meetings during the 2019 calendar year:

Q3 In 2019, how many public board meetings did your library hold?

Q4 In 2019, what was the LARGEST number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended any single board meeting?

Q5 In 2019, what was the TYPICAL number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended board meetings?

Board meetings can also be attended by library staff members.

Q6 In 2019, what was the TYPICAL number of staff members (not general public) who attended board meetings?

Consider your library system's regular public board meetings during the 2020 calendar year:

Q7 In 2020, how many public board meetings did your library hold?

Q8 Of those public board meetings held in 2020, how many were conducted electronically?

Q9 In 2020, what was the LARGEST number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended any single ELECTRONIC board meeting?

Q10 In 2020, what was the TYPICAL number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended ELECTRONIC board meetings?

Board meetings can also be attended by library staff members.

Q11 In 2020, what was the typical number of staff members (not general public) who attended ELECTRONIC board meetings?

Q12 For those meetings held electronically in 2020, what software/platforms were used?

	Never used (1)	Used at least once but not always (2)	Used exclusively (3)
Conference call via telephone (1)	•	•	•
Zoom (2)	•	•	•
WebEx (3)	•	•	•
Google Meet (4)	•	•	•
Microsoft Teams (5)	•	•	•
Skype (6)	•	•	•
Other (7)	•	•	•

Q13 If you selected "other" in the previous question, what software/platform did you use?

Q14 What challenges, if any, were encountered while holding electronic board meetings?

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Often (3)	Most of the time (4)
Board trustees having difficulty with software/platform (1)	•	•	•	•
Library administrators having difficulty with the software/platform (2)	•	•	•	•
Public attendees having difficulty with the software/platform (3)	•	•	•	•
Unable to meet accessibility needs of an attendee (4)	•	•	•	•
Unruly/disrespectful public attendees (5)	•	•	•	•
Network/Connectivity issues (6)	•	•	•	•
Cost of software (7)	•	•	•	•

Q15 Please describe any additional challenges you encountered holding electronic board meetings:

Provincial legislation, regulation, and/or municipal bylaws determine the ways that public libraries can operate. Consider the policies that impacted your library system's ability to hold in-person public board meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q16 Which policies prevented your library from holding public board meetings in-person during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please select all that apply.

- Municipal bylaw (1)
- Libraries Act (2)
- Municipal Act (3)
- Provincial regulation (4)
- Directive from public health department (5)
- Directive from municipal council (6)
- Other (7)

Q17 If you selected "other" in the previous question, please describe.

Q18 If applicable, please identify the provincial or municipal legislative or policy changes that caused your library system to hold its board meetings electronically. Describe whether or not you found these changes challenging to implement.

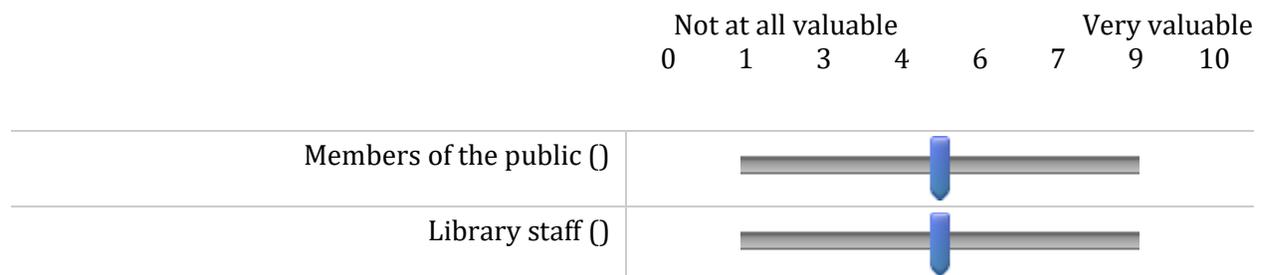
Consider how your library system plans to hold public board meetings after the COVID-19 pandemic is over:

Q19 Does your library system plan to incorporate aspects of online participation by the public after the pandemic is over?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q20 Please describe how your library system plans to incorporate online public participation in board meetings after the pandemic is over.

Q21 On a scale from 0 to 10, how valuable is it to have the following groups attend library board meetings?



Please provide some details about your library system:

Q22 In which province is your library system located?

- Alberta (1)
- British Columbia (2)
- Manitoba (3)
- Nova Scotia (4)
- Ontario (5)

Q23 What is the population of your library system's service area?

Appendix B – Survey results

Q0 Consent: I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily.

Yes	308
No	0

*Note: Survey filtered out respondents who answered “No”

Q1 Does your library system hold regularly scheduled public meetings for a governing board (i.e. Board of directors, Board of trustees)?

Yes	308
No	0

*Note: Survey filtered out respondents who answered “No”

Q2 On a scale from 0 to 10, how important is it to have the following groups attend library board meetings?

	Not at all valuable						Very valuable				
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Members of the public	23	32	11	48	35	34	28	23	7	12	21
Library staff	11	19	5	27	13	30	22	28	18	29	88

Consider your library system's regular public board meetings during the 2019 calendar year:

Q3 In 2019, how many public board meetings did your library hold?

Number of meetings	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Frequency of response	1	1	0	1	9	2	80	5	13	32	148	23	11	2	1

Q4 In 2019, what was the LARGEST number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended any single board meeting?

Number of attendees	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	15	20	30
Frequency of response	133	56	33	20	8	5	3	1	2	2	3	1	2	1	2

Q5 In 2019, what was the TYPICAL number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended board meetings?

Number attendees	0	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	9	25
Frequency of response	235	19	11	2	1	2	1	1	2	1

Board meetings can also be attended by library staff members.

Q6 In 2019, what was the TYPICAL number of staff members (not general public) who attended board meetings?

Number attendees	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	12	15	25
Frequency of response	90	103	46	11	6	9	3	2	1	2	1	1	1

Consider your library system's regular public board meetings during the 2020 calendar year:

Q7 In 2020, how many public board meetings did your library hold?

#	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	18
Frequency	2	2	1	6	11	11	15	33	43	44	61	16	16	3	2	2	1	1

Q8 Of those public board meetings held in 2020, how many were conducted electronically?

#	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Frequency	19	9	11	16	23	35	34	40	46	20	12	0	3	3

Q9 In 2020, what was the LARGEST number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended any single ELECTRONIC board meeting?

#	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	40
Frequency	174	36	11	83	1	2	2	0	2	2	2	1

Q10 In 2020, what was the TYPICAL number of public attendees (not including board members or staff making presentations) who attended ELECTRONIC board meetings?

#	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	15	25
Frequency	213	15	4	2	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	1

Board meetings can also be attended by library staff members.

Q11 In 2020, what was the typical number of staff members (not general public) who attended ELECTRONIC board meetings?

#	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	20	28	55
Frequency	84	89	27	12	10	11	4	2	1	0	3	1	1	1

Q12 For those meetings held electronically in 2020, what software/platforms were used?

	Never used	Used at least once but not always	Used exclusively
Conference call via phone	65	29	7
Zoom	19	31	175
WebEx	71	6	8
Google Meet	71	5	5
Microsoft Teams	63	10	14
Skype	72	5	1
Other	58	11	10

Q13 If you selected "other" in the previous question, what software/platform did you use?

Name of software	# of times mentioned
GoToMeeting	9
Livestreamed to social media	3
Email	3
GoToConnect	1
Phone	1
Callbridge	1
Facetime	1
Hybrid in-person and Zoom	1
Messenger chat	1
Jitsi	1
Pragmatic conferencing	1
GlobalMeet	1

Unsure	1
Total # responses:	25

Q14 What challenges, if any, were encountered while holding electronic board meetings?

	Never	Rarely	Often	Most of the time
Board trustees having difficulty with software/platform	13	134	79	17
Library administrators having difficulty with the software/platform	111	112	9	1
Public attendees having difficulty with the software/platform	157	44	6	2
Unable to meet accessibility needs of an attendee	169	42	5	2
Unruly/disrespectful public attendees	211	2	2	1
Network/Connectivity issues	38	108	79	13
Cost of software	153	44	16	6

Q15 Please describe any additional challenges you encountered holding electronic board meetings:

Theme	# times mentioned
Poor connectivity	28
Poor trustee technology skills	25
Administrative challenges	14
Reduced trustee engagement	11
Lack of socialization/networking	11
Inadequate computer equipment	9
Discussion does not flow easily	9
Distractions during meetings	4
Zoom fatigue	4
Cost of software	3
Poor public engagement	1

Provincial legislation, regulation, and/or municipal bylaws determine the ways that public libraries can operate. Consider the policies that impacted your library system's ability to hold in-person public board meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q16 Which policies prevented your library from holding public board meetings in-person during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please select all that apply.

Option	# of times selected
Municipal bylaw	20
Libraries Act	5
Municipal Act	2
Provincial regulation	180
Directive from public health department	184
Directive from municipal council	58
Other	37

Q17 If you selected "other" in the previous question, please describe.

Themes	# of times mentioned
An abundance of caution / Board member preference	18
Board decision	5
Council decision	1
Library policy	6
Provincial restrictions	4
Public Health Unit recommendations	1
School Board decision	3

Q18 If applicable, please identify the provincial or municipal legislative or policy changes that caused your library system to hold its board meetings electronically. Describe whether you found these changes challenging to implement.

Themes	# of times mentioned
Provincial directive	68
Distancing limitations	20
Public Health Directives	17
Municipality/Council directives	14
Library Board Bylaw/Policy	9
Facility closure	6
Municipal Act	2
Public Library Act	2

Was it challenging?	Frequency of response
At first, yes.	7
Yes	18
No	30
N/A (no answer)	81

Consider how your library system plans to hold public board meetings after the COVID-19 pandemic is over:

Q19 Does your library system plan to incorporate aspects of online participation by the public after the pandemic is over?

	Frequency of response
Yes	123
No	131

Q20 Please describe how your library system plans to incorporate online public participation in board meetings after the pandemic is over.

Theme	# times mentioned
Already offered electronic before, will continue to offer electronic post-pandemic	7
Expect a hybrid blend of electronic and in-person meetings going forward. Some answers included reasoning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 mentioned distance as a barrier; 	27

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 mentioned winter weather conditions as a barrier and ; • 1 mentioned seeing increased participation in 2020 while offering electronic. 	
Electronic option available as needed	31
Plan to livestream online / on social media	7
Plans to move ahead with electronic meetings post-pandemic. Some answers included reasoning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 mentioned winter weather conditions as a barrier and; • 3 mentioned seeing increased participation in 2020 while offering electronic. 	19
Unsure	21

Q21 On a scale from 0 to 10, how valuable is it to have the following groups attend library board meetings?

	Not at all valuable						Very valuable				
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Members of the public	16	26	8	47	22	36	21	21	10	11	17
Library staff	11	11	7	26	6	30	14	32	16	23	71

Please provide some details about your library system:

Q22 In which province is your library system located?

Province	Frequency
Alberta	90
British Columbia	37
Manitoba	14
Nova Scotia	4
Ontario	163

Q23 What is the population of your library system's service area?

Bin #	Population Description	Frequency
1	Less than 2,500	46
2	Between 2,500-4,999	39
3	Between 5,000-9,999	34
4	Between 10,000-14,999	32
5	Between 15,000-29,999	33
6	Between 30,000-99,999	34
7	100,000 and higher	39