



Notes from the CNSP virtual meeting: Reopening Scientific Platforms: What has worked, what has not? June 16, 2020

Executive Summary

The virtual meeting was organized as follows. The Main session was to articulate the three questions and explain the principles of the breakout rooms – Each breakout room allowed for more in depth discussion with a smaller number of people. Notes and chat summary were collated and are presented below, they represent the discussion topic and **are not** official recommendations from CNSP.

- Welcome and Introduction to Zoom - **5 Min**
- Polling Questions about Reopening - **5 Min**
- Presentation – Reopening Scientific Platforms - **10 Min**
- Small Group Discussion - **25 min**
- Discussion with the whole group and wrap up - **10 min**
- Scientific Platform Sustainability Working Group – call for interest - **5 min**

These notes do not necessarily reflect CNSP views, but reflect an open discussion around the points that were raised

A – Are people following the rules? If not, how do we enforce them?

Rules compliance/no compliance – Monitoring issues

Large Consensus on the following

- Difficult to track how well rules are being observed as only users in the facility.
- People are generally following the rules, but monitoring is hard
- Compliance hard to monitor, reliant on goodwill of users.
- Enforcement is trust-based
- Difficult to see if everyone follows the rules - unless you have someone dedicated to that

- Some examples where rules are not followed
- May be more challenging as things gradually ramp up.
- Received reports from other that people are cleaning very quickly, perhaps not thorough;
- Finds some users overzealous, and are getting samples for NMR with chemicals other than just EtOH on the outside, sends out reminders to users to be careful
- Never closed since it is in a hospital, but access is only for onsite people -
- Due to access limitation (time) in order not to pay more now they have to organize better. Trying to have IOT online from the phone to run the robot
- There is a trend, particularly in locations with less COVID19 cases, of people becoming more relaxed and no longer following the rules.
- Only instrument managers in lab, no users yet. Having difficulty with contractors/janitorial staff not observing protocols and needing reminders.
- runs at 20% capacity, masks required in common areas, a lot of cleaning (door handles, keyboards, mice...) and physical distancing is enforced, a scheduling system has been set in order to make sure people do not work in the same room. Activity is ramping up slowly: no problem so far because only a few people are

working. They are afraid that situation will change with the next reopening phase where more people will be coming

- operate at 33% capacity. Just opened yesterday. Everyone is following the rules (not everyone on the floor at the same time, PPE mandatory, one fume hood and work bay per user)
- teaching lab just reopened; only a few research lab opened. So far people seem to comply to the rules
- Created a calendar to ensure that not more than 2 people are the room.
- open to 50% capacity. People do comply. A lot of booking on instrument: people may not have enough access to the instrument
- People are bringing their own masks. Lab coats that are only used in the lab.

Rules enforcement

- First time a warning and then remove access to the building/rooms.
- When people are not following the rules - usually email and notice to PI is sufficient
- If issue: Sends friendly reminder when need be . . . Make them understand it's for their protection. It took a lot of time to put up the rules
- Forced remote solutions, this is a good thing Working with the PIs to minimize impact and strengthen communications
- Enforcement, when required, is being implemented by facility staff.
- One facility requires users to scan in/out when entering or leaving the facility.
- Highly managed environment, protocol includes 1:1 training (phase II re-opening)
- Managing numbers via booking so training possible
- General contractors/facility staff are more casual, but users are compliant.
- Access to the facilities is not allowed if they don't follow the rules. Some equipment is restricted, which limits the # users on site; no mandatory masks, gloves and PPE, so physical distancing must be observed!
- Masks will be mandatory, and users will have to provide a form showing they have not been exposed and have no symptoms
- the facility keeps sending messages to remind users; again, hard to tell when you work remotely; Have staff made any changes
- The institute has 2 floor managers per floor who keep track of and to whom you can report if there are any problems (COVID compliance related); if not present (she is one of the floor managers) then others monitor and report to her; she believes most people are following rules; they are at Stage 1, 25% and in two weeks will go to Stage 2 50% occupancy. Have limited access to NMR room to just herself

Full Service Strategy

- provide full services, so the staff must comply and follow the directives from the institution. SP must make sure no contamination arises when users deliver samples. In addition, they have a room with small shared equipment: people tend to follow the rule (but there's only a small fraction (30%) of people who are working on campus now)

Communication/Training

- Multiple communication issues associated with permission/timing of opening
- Interact with all users so see them and make sure they are complying before they go in.
- Signage saying if you don't follow the rules then they will be banned from the facility.
- Training on standby
- physical distancing was an issue, but communication and discussion helped

Still not reopened

- Computational/High Performance computing/data centre: attendance on campus prohibited still, no in-person meetings.
- runs a 1-person SP that will open on June 29.

- Still wondering which will be the best way to get users physically distanced.

Comments on Prioritization of users/work

- I've asked PIs to prioritize within their labs before sending requests to the histology core.
- COVID 19 research is not a priority but since most of the funding applications currently are COVID related, they are kind of pushed more. We are keeping it first come first serve but COVID seems like an unspoken prioritized area even in this phase.
- "Squeaky wheel" is not really prioritized but I am sure that may have some impact to reduce stress.
- We are not doing the prioritization at this time as we have 100% capacity but 25% user density. I would not be comfortable deciding whose projects are more important than others.
- We have been told to accommodate external users.
- We are also not doing prioritization- there would be too many priorities- but if there were one- we might make COVID19 research first- as the grants have very short timelines
- Since we're not back 100% and everyone is still in ramp-up mode, we just assume that all of the work done at the moment is a priority for that lab
- Memorial is doing things a little differently, taking a staged approach to restoring access. Requests to access campus for research are reviewed by a central committee based on critical need for now, broadening as the province also loosens its restrictions.
- U of Manitoba similar to Memorial in this, was initially COVID or isolated fieldwork only, now centrally managed to ensure fractional load in buildings. But if the work to be done can be done at home, permission not granted.
- Our cores at BC Children's Hospital are also having similar approach with intake forms and various review committees approve the requests
- McGill as well, at least within the Faculty of Medicine
- the LDI is a small institute, so we are still operating as a first come first serve basis. I am limiting cell sorting at 2-3 experiments per week. No complaints so far, users are very understanding.

B – Are you feeling pressure from users and PIs to offer services at a certain level?

Pressure for training

- Pressure from PIs to get users trained
- Training is not mandatory/offered during phase 1
- There is some pressure from PI to train new users.
- Training requests are coming in fast, but staff are not full time. Only offering limited training. Users do an online course first. Did a few trainings in person with masks and plan to use face shields as well.
- As re-opening, some facilities being pressured by PIs who want all their (new) students trained/independent, difficult if there are limitations on staffing which preclude most in-person training.
- No training at this stage.

Pressure for reopening - modify rules

- There is Pressure to physically go in the institute - but also be available to go into the rooms which seems a bit early

Pressure for Access Internal

- PIs demand exceeds capacity with new constraints. (is this by stage of work relative to thesis/publication being finalized)
- PIs asked to prioritize within their teams to ease login of bookings.
- Institutional request for PIs to prioritize internal work over external work
- Lots of people wanting access
- Pressure and some stress from people
- Access - most people are not working at a high priority - prioritizing access

- Pressure - not from users and PI, ask to prioritize
- Priority for project internal vs external
- Tell the PI facility cannot proceed - it's difficult to satisfy requests
- Set guidelines for access – priority for COVID, then manuscript revisions, students finishing thesis programs.
- Provincial guidelines have mandated some priority rules.
- Some PIs needed to be told that “if I get sick and the facility has to shut for a few weeks then there will be no access or training” in order to deal with pressure.
- Some facilities have experienced the issue of students (often stressed to finish up their projects) showing up at their door even though the facility has not yet reopened.
- In some institutes there has been the issue of researchers receiving approval to continue with their project, and access to campus/buildings, but this has not been communicated to facility staff. While in other institutes approval status, building access permission and communication with all relevant parties has been centrally controlled and well delivered.
- still operate under 1st come 1st served. However, some PIs have a priority research (COVID), but the platforms have several criteria to prioritize users but COVID is only one of the 9 criteria. SP are asked to prioritize internal over external, which will make some more loss of revenue

Pressure for Access External

- Pressure from outside clients while closed, resolved now that work has resumed.
- Pressure when fully closed from external clients who did not recognize that Central Administration defined whether or not facility could be available.

Pressure for more time

- users want more time (we are 7am to 7:30pm in three blocks with 30min buffer)
- limits hours of “presence” by email; weekdays 9-5 will help troubleshoot etc.; keep user expectation lower. asked if there was a different “channel” for emails dealing with emergencies; Eric explained that they promoted use of campus security for those calls

Other systems in place

- Microsoft Teams is used in place of texting, users can log in at each of the stations, where Microsoft teams has been downloaded
- For a grant we offer full service = for preliminary data
- used to use VNC with a webcam that was already installed at the facility
- Waiving support staff fees for some PIs as users aren't yet permitted in the facility.
- I had a Web cam to install on my own funds - we were being allowed (temporarily) to access things remotely.

Challenges/Positive points

- Challenge is how to ramp up to accept more users
- Making things possible under constraints, some solutions came up that can be carried beyond the crisis
- they were not sure which facilities had been approved for reopening, communication issues
- find he has to explain to users that every lab will have a different situation and different access due to Covid projects, critical research, experience, etc.; finds communicating by email rather than in person can lead to more problems as it is difficult to explain, and tone; talked about limiting answers to email to weekdays, not evening and weekends, to improve staff mental health
- Had to do the rules alone, but communication problems with what the admin decided
- Students and PI's asking facility staff for a clear timeline on when they are going to reopen, however, facility staff are dependent on receiving a green light from the University/Institute before they can ease restrictions. It is important that this fact is communicated clearly to users.

- For core facilities that offer services to people outside of their Institute, the external users are not physically allowed on campus. This creates logistical challenges.
- A general concern that as restrictions are eased there will be a sudden 'rush' of users/Pis wanting to use our facilities. How feasible will it be for us to maintain our social distancing/hygiene procedures when faced with this pressure? How will things need to be modified? Should we now start loading up on PPE? How much demand will there be in the Fall?

No Pressure

- As only 75% of people on campus this is generally not a concern
- We have some COVID research so we never closed, but never felt pressure We do contact following/tracing so in case someone gets sick we can trace - then users are comfortable with coming to the facility.
- Not really, before we opened, Pis had to give plans - each student had to follow the rules and there was no full access directly - It had to be done in phases with justified usage need. The pressure is coming more from myself for help and troubleshooting - sometimes it needs more than what I can give. We had Full support from admin and health and safety - we suggested the rules
- LDI very open, health and safety helped with the rules - they are unique in imaging core, different from different rules - above and beyond what the rest of LDI is doing - night shifts. Some Good thing – IT systems can access instruments from home and troubleshoot from home - not perfect but works well
- ask Pis to reduce their requests so this will allow more clients to have access to the platform
- does more police than before, but no pressure form Pis
- some stress due to the difference of guidelines in hospitals vs. campus. E.g., PPE are mandatory at some places, but not elsewhere etc....
- no pressure from Pis or users. Priority is given to 'mission critical' labs and non-critical researchers understand that they can't access the facility.
- Consensus on saying there was no real stress encountered by the group. It seems people are doing ok Some
- positive outcome - resilient and creative We are all in this together. Helpful to see everybody's solutions -
- contact tracing in a more meaningful way - show how contact tracing can be beneficial for everybody
- Pressure and stress from prospect of facility closure/layoff of staff.

C – How to manage your stress levels and those of your staff?

Reactions with returning to work

- Very little was reported for stress of facility staff. Only the rare instance of a facility employee refusing to physically return due – understandably - to concern for elderly family members.
- Some staff just delighted to be back in the lab.
- Stress levels are ok, people focused on making things work
- Stress was ok in the group Easier to explain to people if we are together.
- Staff stress levels tend to go down when returning to work and getting back into routine.
- Some staff scared to come to work.
- Some staff feeling more stressed, may ease as they get used to new routines/processes/signage
- Some staff happy to finally get out of the house and back to work
- Work a more controlled environment (safer) than shopping for groceries.

Financial concern

- Stress due to decreased revenue and impact on faculty performance evaluation/support
- Facilities that will have to close and Manager will be laid off.
- Impact on revenue. To Prevent pressure - Labs were asked to reduce the workload sent to facility - global effort from everyone

- Stress essentially for revenue - year-end application for
- has had massive stress, there were hints or people saying that cores might be shut down due to losses; Brent said that it certainly was hard to deal with, especially mixed messages, and mentioned that he heard Ottawa (Govt) was injecting half a billion dollars into (Universities?,science?)
- U Manitoba is looking to downsize cores; hopes for Federal \$\$ to cores – says “save staff” is missing from details of compensation from Ottawa; and funders (e.g. CIHR) have cancelled competitions etc.
- There is definite stress for revenue and year end reviews for faculty support.
- Seeing as the fiscal year ended at the end of April, I am hoping that the bottom line will look better in 10 months.
- Managers stressed about financial situation. How to make the budgets balance.
- Stress of being laid off, salaries coming from fees, short term contracts.

Other concerns

- faculty report - performance will be affected, uncertainty will affect evaluation.
- PPE equipment - sometimes an issue to get them
- Some institutions implemented phase 1 quickly and without good communication to cores.
- Managing group of 21 – a lot of people to manage.

Measures to alleviate stress level

- Agreed that it is good to focus on core staff mental health
- printed-out poster labelled “Stretch” – to encourage frequent stretching exercises; with his team there are regular communications, to see how people are doing; they also chat with members of other cores as they share some users

D – added an extra question – What did work and what didn’t?

- the first few weeks were poor, in that communications from University were not clear on guidelines; took a while to work things out; they reduced number of instruments since you can’t increase space
- going slowly, with strict rules; they have been supported by PIs etc.; also mentioned that no money was coming through (e.g. Terry Fox, CFI)

Poll questions (noted record)

The poll results did not get recorded due to a technical issue with zoom and the numbers for all polls minus the last one are approximate.

Q1 - Is/are your facility/facilities currently open?	
a. Yes, only for COVID research	12%
b. Yes, but with limited capacity and new health/safety restrictions	88%
c. No, but we will re-open in the next week	
d. No, and we will NOT re-open in the next week	

Q2 - How are things going?	
a. Easier in practice than I expected– 22%	22%
b. More challenging than I expected	
c. As I expected – 40%	40%
d. Too soon to say– 27%	27%
e. Not opened yet	

Q3 - Are you running at reduced staffing levels?	
a. Yes, because of staff at high risk or sickness	
b. Yes, because of institutional policy on reduced occupancy	57%
c. Yes, because staff have young kids at home without childcare	
d. No, not required	24%
e. No, but we would rather have made adjustments	

Comments generated by poll question #3 (staffing levels)

- Do you mean physical present on site ?
- Yes, I think it indicates staff scheduling for operations
- We had both reasons- need for less occupancy and staff with child care issues
- I picked the first answer option RE: staffing, but really we are reduced because somebody is stuck abroad because of travel restrictions.
- For us it's the 3 first choices...
- Only staff, but “working from home”, as much as possible is preferred by university
- Not the case for me anymore but sometime, the core is a staff of 1 person

Q4 - How much buffer time are you implementing between users?	
a. 0 mins	~17%
b. 1-15 mins	~17%
c. 16-30 mins	~30%
d. 31 mins – 60 mins	
e. > 60 mins	
f. Not applicable	~30%

Comments generated by poll question #4 (time between users)

- We don't have a formal buffer time, but in practice the users email the next one to let them know if they are running late- and my users tell me they are not back to back
- 30 min but no way to check if it's respected,Ä¶
- We book instruments over Google calendar to ensure no overlap and wipe down stations between users

Q5 - Are your users using gloves?	
a. Yes	50%
b. No	

c. Voluntary	~35%
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Q6 - Are masks being worn?	
a. Mandated	60%
b. Optional/Recommended	40%
c. No	
d. Are masks being worn?	

Comments generated by poll question #6 (masks)

- For platforms without users, this would be applied to staff?
- mandated only when physical distancing is not possible
- It is not recommended but optional, so picked 2nd one regardless
- mandated whenever 2 m cannot be enforced
- Masks are University mandated in Guelph/Ontario
- We decided to mandate masks- ourselves- not institutional policy, because although the instruments are 2M apart, they have to share sink and waste disposal area
- depends on physical distancing and microscope use
- Yes, mask mandated when 2m distance can not be respected
- only when we have to be close
- for us masks in publicly shared spaces
- Masks are mandated on our floor, we can't know when we'll meet someone so better have your mask on already
- I think within guidelines to mask if 2M can't be maintained
- In microscope rooms, masks have to stay on even when alone in the room

Q7 - Are your PPE rules above and beyond the institutional guidelines?	
a. Yes	32%
b. No	57%
c. Don't know	

Comments generated by poll question #7 (PPE)

- We are allowed to make specific adjustments but already warned that shortage of supply of PPE may not make it possible for us to implement above and beyond rules

Q8 - What criteria are used to prioritize access to your facility?	TOP 2
a. Manuscript final revision, MSc/PhD student finishing	
b. next was PDF finishing contract.	

A number of participants noted that their institutions have centralized who is permitted back on campus (e.g. initially Covid only, then experimentalists but not computational/theoreticians) and are using this to manage numbers on campus. As a consequence, these cores are not having to implement such prioritizations.

Q9 - Are your facility staff salaries paid from any of the following (check all that apply)?	
a. CIHR grants directly	5%
b. NSERC grants directly	12%
c. CFI IOF- 33%	33%
d. User Fees- 57%	57%
e. Private Foundations- 14%	14%
f. Institutional Funding (hard money) - 64%	64%
g. Don't know- 7%	7%

Wrap up

- It is the right time to raise the issue of salary support for platform scientists – one-pager position paper to write ASAP Agreed with the group. We don't want to fall into a gap. Especially for facilities that rely mostly on user fee to pay salaries
- We should include data on loss of revenue - will draft a poll in order to have this information
- Volunteers for working group are asked to email directly CNSP Working on Scientific Platforms sustainability
- Think about the questions, email all the members - give them categories & combine with survey monkey? will be a lot of work, but data is very important - Express as a % of normal - normalize so that the facilities can compare. Questions: How much in fees have you lost based on last year as a % of normal + \$\$ amount % of expected?
- How many salaries have you spent when people were at home?