I love how libraries can foster the good life in their communities and have a profound respect for the work that people in libraries do.

As the director of a small, rural library for almost 10 years, and working for a library system that supports the great work of small and rural libraries I developed a deep appreciation for the importance of rural libraries in their communities. Being a researcher on this project strengthened my conviction that what libraries do matters. I have a passion for seeing people who work in libraries flourish.

Soon into the COVID-19 pandemic I was feeling the weight of how uncertain things were. I was keenly aware of the struggle that I, and the people around me, seemed to be having with uncertainty. As I thought about our case study communities and director interviews I was impressed by how people moved forward and did things that contributed to community wellbeing, despite uncertain outcomes.

I designed these questions to walk through a situation with an unknown outcome. I find that first acknowledging uncertainty can take away some of its power so I can figure out possible solutions. Sometimes the solution involves asking for help or letting some parts of it go.

For this exercise, I invite you to keep it light, it is not meant to dive into significant concerns or situations causing a great amount of distress. For deeper uncertainty, you may want to talk about it with a trusted friend or counselor.

What is in this tool?
This is a series of reflective exercises to help the user unpack where uncertainty exists, what impacts it has on their life, and identify strategies that work for them to process through the feelings and impacts that come with uncertainty.
TAKE A MOMENT
Take a moment to think about a specific scenario where the outcome is not known and that makes you feel mildly uncomfortable.
* Perhaps it is a library situation; a question, a problem, a past situation, or future plan like a big (exciting) library project?*

Write down your scenario with enough detail that you can refer to it for answers to subsequent questions.

My uncertain scenario...

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
What thoughts and feelings come up as you think about this uncertain situation?

Rather than analyze or judge them, write them down and just notice them for a minute. Rather than allowing the uncomfortable feelings and thoughts to stop you from moving forward, can you accept they are there and then lay them aside (let go of them) for this exercise?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

It can be useful to notice which parts of a situation you think you can control and which you can't. Jot down a short list here:

Within My Control

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

- Action Step

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Outside of My Control

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

- Who on my team or in my community can help?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

- Is it something I need to let go?

________________________________________________________________________
Throughout our study, we noticed that librarians who deal well with uncertainty, are commonly able to approach the future with curiosity rather than fear.

If you approached your example of uncertainty with curiosity, what types of things would you want to know??

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

What questions would you ask?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

If you accepted your own internal discomfort and had external support what actions would you take?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

Finally, what are the things you would tell a dear friend in this same situation? List them here:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

*Now, read this list back to yourself with kindness.*

Wrap-up guidance/next steps

How does it feel to do this exercise? Do you feel better after noticing and accepting the uncertainty of the situation? Do you have a plan that will help you get started? Are there things you don’t have to carry anymore? Do you know who to ask for help?

It is my hope that facing uncertainty with awareness becomes a practice that you can use again and again. I hope it moves you, your library, and your community forward. Even in uncertainty, I hope you enjoy your job and I hope you flourish.