

## **Institute of Professional Editors COVID-19 Survey 1:**

### **The impacts of COVID-19 on editors and their employment, editing work and activities**

#### **Background**

The survey is the first of a series aimed at seeking feedback about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) members and their employment, editing work and related activities. The information will be used as part of IPEd’s ongoing support and advocacy for members and the industry. The survey questions were general, but targeted surveys about short and long-term financial and other effects will be distributed later.

The survey was sent via email to all members on 14 April 2020, with a closing date of 28 April. A total of 235 respondents (approximately 18% of IPEd’s active membership) completed the survey.

Member responses related to an approximate percentage of branch membership:

Table 1: Branch affiliation (n = 235)

Branch	Number of responses	% of overall responses	% of branch membership
Editors Aotearoa New Zealand	18	7.66%	38%
Editors Tasmania	6	2.55%	21%
Editors Western Australia	11	4.68%	12%
Editors South Australia	20	8.51%	18%
Editors Victoria	87	37.02%	20%
Editors Queensland	36	15.32%	14%
Editors New South Wales	57	24.26%	16%

#### **Question 1: Location of respondents**

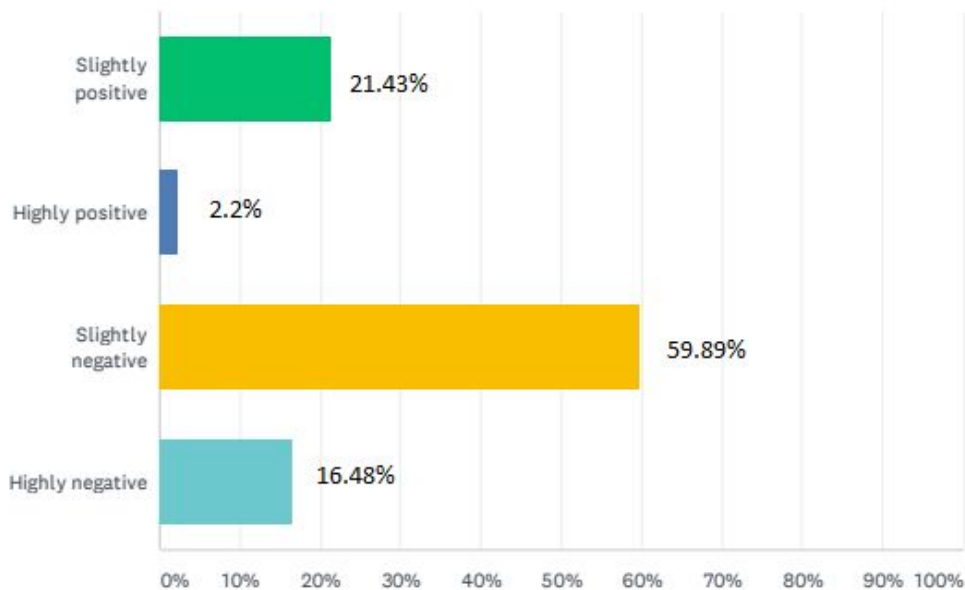
Australia-based members comprised 90.6% of respondents, New Zealand 8.1% and other locations (UK and Thailand) 1.1%. Almost all respondents (232) provided further information about their state, region or town. Based on this information, it appears approximately 9% of respondents are in regional or rural locations.

#### **Effects of COVID-19**

**Question 2: Overall, has COVID-19 affected your activities (work, study, professional development), positively or negatively?**

Of the 222 respondents who answered this question, 6.3% indicated they have been affected positively, 40.5% were affected negatively and 53.6% experienced both negative and positive effects.

**Question 2 cont.: If some of each, to what level has the impact been?**



**Figure 1: Level of impact (n = 182)**

Of the 182 respondents who answered this question, almost 60% have experienced a level of impact that could be described as slightly negative.

**Question 3: If you are able to quantify the effects (e.g. % drop in work) or you wish to provide other information, please do so.**

The question provided an open field for responses, of which there were 191. Of those, approximately 56% indicated they are experiencing a decrease in income. Of the responses that quantified this effect type, the percentages ranged from a 10% to a 100% decrease in income. The primary reasons cited were:

- fewer queries for new work
- clients cancelling or delaying payment for projects
- work being delayed
- projects being cancelled due to a downturn or complete cessation in business in other industries (e.g. advertising and events)
- hours being reduced
- roles being made redundant or being reduced.

The remaining 46% of responses were varied, with some stating there are no identified effects yet, while others indicated it is too early to know. Some respondents indicated they are experiencing other effects, such as the challenges of working from home, with increased childcare commitments, the effects of increased stress on their mental health and reduced opportunities for job seeking.

Others stated they have experienced no effects so far and others are experiencing some positive effects including increased work and better work–life balance from having projects moved to work-from-home arrangements.

**Question 4: What type of activities have been affected? Select all that apply.**

Table 2: Activity types that have been affected (n = 217)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Professional development events or workshops (attendee)	44.24%	96
Professional development events or workshops (presenter)	13.82%	30
Networking events or activities	44.24%	96
Work (full-time employee)	17.51%	38
Work (part-time employee)	9.68%	21
Work (full-time freelance)	36.87%	80
Work (part-time freelance)	29.03%	63
Study (full-time, on-campus)	0.00%	0
Study (part-time, on-campus)	2.76%	6
Study (full-time, online)	0.00%	0
Study (part-time, online)	3.69%	8
Other (please specify)	10.60%	23
Total Respondents: 217		

This question attracted 217 responses, with respondents able to select all choices that applied to their circumstances. The activity types with the most selections were professional development events or workshops (attendees), networking events or activities, work (full-time freelance), work (part-time freelance) and work (full-time employee).

Respondents could provide additional information under ‘Other’ and these responses related mainly to other forms of work and activities and to their individual circumstances. Other activities listed were:

- casual and/or ‘on-call’ work
- contractor work, full-time or part-time (this can relate to working for one employer on an ongoing or fixed term basis)
- sub-contractor, full-time or part-time (this can relate to working for two or more employers on an ongoing or fixed term basis)
- volunteer work.

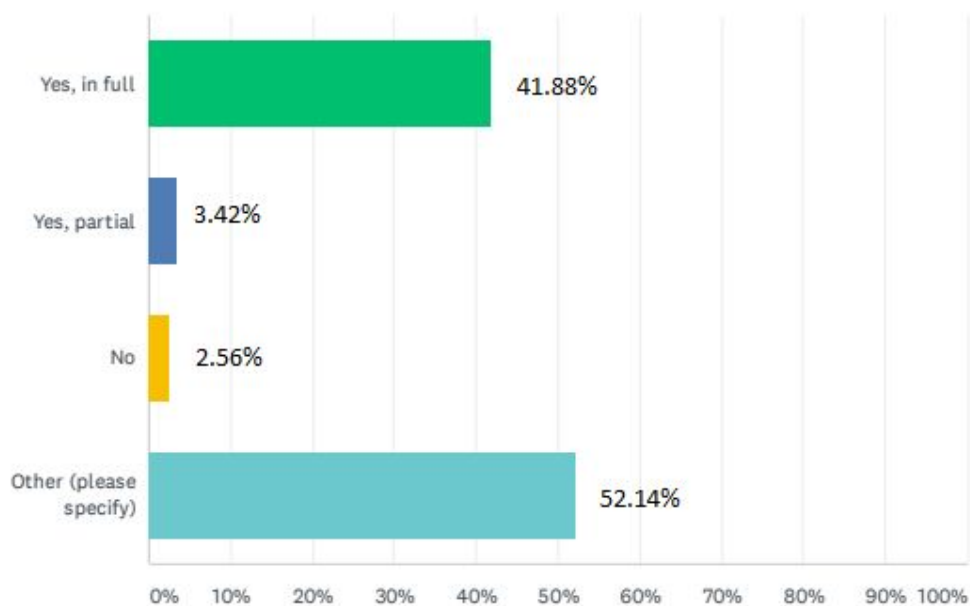
**Question 5: If you selected professional development or networking activities that you were planning to attend, how were they affected?**

There was a total of 154 responses, with 37.66% noting that professional development or networking activities had been moved to online delivery, 28.57% that events had been cancelled and

21.43% that events had been postponed. Responses gathered under 'Other' provided feedback that included:

- All the options above occurring depending on the activity type as respondents are involved in a broad range of professional development and networking activities.
- Uncertainty about planned events (e.g. networking, conferences, professional development, book launches), in some cases due to lack of communication from event organisers.
- Increased accessibility to events or activities that have moved to online delivery.
- Some cases of complete cancellation of events.

**Question 6: If an event that you have paid for has been cancelled, have you been able to receive a refund?**



**Figure 2: Event refund outcomes (n = 117)**

Of the 52.1% who selected 'Other', there was a range of answers, including that:

- Events or activities booked were free.
- Events or activities booked had been booked but not yet paid for.
- Deposits that were provided to venues are being held over for future bookings.
- Some attendees have forgone refunds in order to support event organisers.
- Credit for use in future courses has been offered and the recipients have elected to use this option in lieu of a refund.
- Events or activities are too far in the future and decisions have not yet been made.

**Question 7: If you are a freelance editor (part-time or full-time), what have been the effects on your work? (Respondents could select more than one option).**

Table 3: Effects on freelance editor work (part-time or full-time) (n = 187, including responses to 'Other'). Respondents could select more than one option.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Client has cancelled job	18.18%	34
Client has postponed job	32.62%	61
Receiving decreased work enquiries	48.13%	90
Receiving increased work enquiries	4.28%	8
About the same for now but expecting a decrease due to fewer enquiries	24.60%	46
About the same for now but expecting an increase due to more enquiries	2.67%	5
Total Respondents: 187		

The responses indicate that, of the freelance editors (part or full-time), most are experiencing decreased work enquiries (48.1%), as well as clients postponing jobs (32.6%). There is also an indication that work appears to be about the same for now, with an expectation that there will be a decrease due to fewer enquiries (24.6%), and some are experiencing clients cancelling jobs (18.2%). To a lesser extent, respondents selected that they are receiving increased work enquiries (4.3%) or that their work is about the same for now, but they are expecting an increase due to more enquiries (2.7%).

There was a free-text option for respondents to provide more information under 'Other', with 66 responses provided, many relating to similar themes. These included the following:

- Some work has been postponed but other work has come in to balance out income.
- Extra work has come in, but this has contributed to less time and more pressure to complete.
- There is the same number of jobs but job-scope has increased, this is good for income but not great for health.
- Delay in being paid by clients or employers.
- Self-employed editors already deal with uncertainty in their work but there seems to be more uncertainty about what work will look like in the future.
- Decrease in amounts of work being sent by regular clients.
- No change to work for some freelance editors in some sectors (e.g. online education, education resources), while there are significant decreases in others (e.g. arts sector, medical, activities that have attendees travelling from interstate or overseas).
- In some news of postponements, there is flagged the possibility that, depending on other factors, a project might need to be cancelled 'for the foreseeable future'. That is, postponement is not a guarantee that intentions will be fulfilled, but may be a more optimistic and collaborative way of communicating about change.
- Likelihood that current contracts will not be extended, even if work is continuing at present.

- Some government clients have cancelled jobs, stating that they need to ‘take back work’ to give to their in-house staff now that some are self-isolating.
- Some private sector clients have indicated they cannot pay for work completed earlier in the year or have had the first phase of a project completed but have indicated they will not be able to engage the editor’s services for the remainder of the project.
- Working from home is affecting productivity because editors may need to share the space with other family members and manage increased childcare responsibilities.
- Increased anxiety and worry for loved ones and the future is affecting productivity.
- Concern about eligibility for sole trader JobKeeper payment as self-employed income was less this time last year.
- There has been no identifiable change yet and work continues to be as normal.

**Question 8: If you are an in-house editor (part-time or full-time), how has your work been affected?**

Table 4: Effects on in-house editors (part-time or full-time) (n = 86, including responses to ‘Other’)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Hours have been reduced	13.95%	12
Have been asked to take leave	3.49%	3
Role has been made redundant or you have been stood down	2.33%	2
Work has moved to online/work-from-home arrangements	43.02%	37
Total Respondents: 86		

Of the 86 editors who responded, 43.0% indicated that their in-house work (part-time or full-time) has been moved to online or work-from-home arrangements, with 14.0% experiencing a reduction in working hours, 3.5% asked to take leave and 2.3% being stood down or having their roles made redundant.

The remaining responses were provided through ‘Other’ and included the following feedback types:

- For those looking for work, there has been a noticeable reduction in the number of jobs advertised each week and, of those that have been applied for, the positions have either been ‘put on hold’ or are no longer required in the current climate.
- The workplace was closed for a month, notification was provided by email and no work-from-home option was provided.
- For in-house contractors, contracts are unlikely to be extended.
- There is a time limit on hours to be worked even though work methods have become more laborious with the move to working from home.
- There has been no real assistance in setting up a secure procedure for working in confidential information from home, or limited or no support from managers.
- There is lack of support for transition to work-from-home arrangements, but also increased isolation and risk to physical and mental health.
- Have not yet been asked to reduce hours or take leave but there is discussion about this occurring and work is reducing.

- Overall workload has not been affected and initial technical hitches in home office setup have mostly been sorted. Pros – less time spent commuting, less interruptions, cons – home office is more cramped (no longer have access to full range of hard-copy resource materials) and internet is slower.
- Casual in-house employees are not all being offered work-from-home arrangements by offices that have needed to close their physical location.

**Question 9: If you had other work related to editing (e.g. paid presenting, training or lecturing work related to editing subjects), how has this been affected?**

Table 5: Effects on work related to editing (n = 84, including responses to ‘Other’)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Time available for work or professional development has been curtailed due to requirements of COVID-19 response	14.29%	12
Scheduled activities have been postponed	29.76%	25
Scheduled activities have been cancelled	20.24%	17
Scheduled activities have moved to online delivery	33.33%	28
Total Respondents: 84		

Those who indicated their work related to editing has been moved to online delivery made up 33.3% of respondents, those with work postponed 29.8% and cancelled 20.2%, with 14.3% indicating that time for work or professional development has been curtailed by COVID-19 requirements.

In response to ‘Other’, respondents provided a range of feedback that included the following:

- Moving to online delivery has been time-consuming and slow.
- Across a number of sectors (indexing, consulting, in-house publications), some that already offered online delivery, there have been no more or fewer work queries since February.
- Some work appears to be delayed or put on hold indefinitely.

**Question 10: Reasons given for changes to professional development and training activities or events**

Table 6: Reason provided for changes (n = 131). Respondents could select all that applied.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Organiser proactively cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19 concerns	70.99%	93
Presenter cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19 concerns	12.98%	17
COVID-19 travel restrictions	23.66%	31
Government advice concerning COVID-19 prohibited the event	32.06%	42
Financial impact of COVID-19 restrictions	5.34%	7
Total Respondents: 131		

The responses indicate that most professional development and training activities or events were proactively cancelled or postponed (71.0%). The next most common reason provided for changes

was government advice concerning COVID-19 that would prohibit the event (32.1%), followed by COVID-19 travel restrictions (23.7%). This was followed by fewer responses indicating that the presenter postponed or cancelled an event due to COVID-19 concerns (13.0%) or that changes were made due to the financial impacts of COVID-19 (5.3%).

Further responses were provided to ‘Other’, including the following:

- A benefit has been that an international event was moved online and can now be attended.
- Events that were proactively cancelled would have been cancelled by the social distancing requirements.
- None of the above reasons were provided.

**Question 11: Reasons provided for changes to paid work activities (in-house and freelance)**

Table 7: Reasons provided for changes (n = 134, including responses to ‘Other’)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Government advice concerning COVID-19 prohibited the work	19.40%	26
Financial impact of COVID-19 restrictions	56.72%	76
Total Respondents: 134		

For 56.7% of respondents the reason for changes to their paid work activities (in-house or freelance) was the financial impact of COVID-19 restrictions, with 19.4% stating that they were told it was because government advice concerning COVID-19 prohibited the work. Further responses provided under ‘Other’ included the following:

- Business model of employer has been decimated and work put on hold, probably not to recommence.
- Publishers postponing books; authors being cautious about spending money.
- The employer has reprioritised projects. As a result most work that the editor was previously employed for will not be written as scheduled but there may be enough peripheral projects; however, the outlook for the next 2–6 months is unclear.
- A reason provided by a thesis editing client (who is a teacher) who postponed the editing work stated that the impact of the coronavirus in their location had delayed work commitments and some aspects of research, requiring them to rewrite sections of their thesis to accommodate the changes in their circumstances.
- Government-related work has seen some being taken off work that was to be edited and moved to work in COVID-19 related activities, with some likelihood that they will return to the original work but at a much later date.
- Decrease in work from international students.
- There has been a chilling or even freezing effect on the market, clients have switched to survival mode and are not outsourcing now.
- No reasons have been given for decreased work – the work has stopped coming through and queries have slowed to a trickle.



**Question 12: What is the estimated date range of these effects?**

Ranges related to professional development activities, paid work, study, and any other activities that could be impacted by COVID-19 were provided by 134 respondents. In terms of professional development activities, most respondents expect that effects will be felt at least until the latter part of 2020 and that it may be some time before in-person professional development can occur in their own locations, let alone interstate or in international locations.

Paid work attracted a similar response, with most responses indicating that the effects have been felt immediately but there are likely to be long-term impacts that are difficult to quantify now. Responses relating to study show that some anticipate impacts until the end of 2020 at least.

The option to provide additional information under 'Other' provided similar responses to those previously collected.

**Question 13: What support do you need? (Respondents could provide responses to as many options as appropriate – from IPEd, from employers, from government, other).**

A total of 142 respondents provided comments, and responses are summarised below.

What support do you need from IPEd? (85 responses)

- Am pleased to be able to attend other states' meetings. This is great.
- Online PD and networking – which is being done beautifully, thank you! This is the silver lining, as we now have access to talks held by other branches too. Let's keep it up!
- Getting the word out there on our behalf that freelance editors are still working and available to help their clients.
- Advocacy and lobbying for freelancers (and others) for govt assistance; provide clarity around govt assistance packages.
- Keep up the good work – thanks for the communications from Karen; swiftly moving member meetings onto Zoom; good timing on transfer of member newsletters to online; thanks for all your hard work on our behalf!
- I'm happy knowing that IPEd is seeking information from a range of sources on which to formulate policy and focus on the best ways to address the situation and represent the industry.
- Online PD delivery (webinars, workshops) and member meetings.
- Potential clients if any contact IPEd.
- Please work with the MEAA to lobby government for more support and information for freelancers. Please proactively promote editors available for work using all your channels. Please provide us with tools to help us claim the JobKeeper allowance (and evidence the 30% drop in income).
- Advocacy for editors and the wider writing profession to government to include the arts and casual freelancers in stimulus packages – the arts has been one of the hardest hit areas of this coronavirus with one of the weakest responses from government.
- Continuing to provide summary advice on available government and other support for people in our profession. Your previous summary of government support was great.
- Some sort of free or low-cost professional development on how to keep your business running through the crisis, even if you don't have many clients (e.g. what sort of marketing activities etc are worth continuing with).

- Free online PD opportunities.
- Information about IPEd re-accreditation due to significant reduction of editing projects and professional development opportunities.
- Perhaps the opportunity to train/develop skills online while out of work.
- Info about online professional development opportunities, local and overseas.
- Confirmation of previous individualised PD 'counting for something'.
- A sense of what types of work are now available for those with editorial skills; i.e. how the norm is affected (e.g. which publishers are or are not offering work) and outside the norm (e.g. any new opportunities, paid or unpaid).
- Receiving reassuring emails from IPEd has been helpful. There is so much uncertainty and isolation at the moment that feeling connected, even if just via email, does help with psychological wellbeing.
- Keeping in touch with members.
- More information – the ASA are a good model for how to do this well.
- Promote the need for editors to writing groups – lots of people will be using their isolation to write!
- Continuing opportunities to stay connected; online events and training.
- A list of businesses that need editing work (i.e.g. government) during this crisis.
- Help finding work, promotion of importance of editing/writing services, especially for government.
- Work passed on from other editors, perhaps.
- Promote online methods of editors working with clients.
- Being kept informed about factual effects (positive, negative) on members.
- More info on effects on freelancers & any govt. initiatives to help freelancers/sole traders.
- Ongoing professional development. Perhaps 'Getting the most out of Zoom', 'Useful tools for working from home', 'Remote desktops compared'.
- Continue to promote what editors do and how they can help with the COVID-19 response.
- Reduction in annual fees for the next billable year.
- General contact with government departments urging them to consider any overdue editing of brochures etc.
- Continue holding branch meetings online if possible and make recordings available to members.
- Advocacy, especially in terms of leniency in proving eligibility for JobKeeper based on prior earnings.

What support do you need from employers? (40 responses)

- Pay accounts on time!
- Reducing workload along with reducing hours; returning staff to normal hours as soon as possible.
- Relevant information and supporting work from home.
- IT support.
- Keep providing work, even if different to what was planned (think flexibly).
- My employer is doing an outstanding job of looking after all of us.
- To think creatively about delivering publications and exhibitions online rather than cancelling.

- Keep on keeping us informed, don't sack us!
- Confirmation of contract extension (no chance of permanency now!)
- Publishers, please communicate with freelancers to let them know what decisions are being made re staffing, schedules and lists, and how this will impact on them.
- Leadership from managers around the level of risk the organisation wishes to take and advice about work procedure in a technical environment that workers are not familiar with.
- Value attached to editing work.
- As much as possible, pursuing the govt assistance (e.g. JobKeeper) over downsizing.
- Automatic extensions on projects that are in progress.
- Maintain employment as per existing arrangements.
- Support while new working arrangements come into place.
- Clarity. Responses to our questions, even if it's, 'Sorry, we don't know yet.'
- Employers have been checking in with me, which is great.
- Job security.
- More understanding about working in trying times!
- Clients: keep those publishing schedules going so editors have work.
- More work ;-)
- Ongoing work past current contract.
- Have more corporate blogs to divvy out.
- Continue work-from-home arrangements for as long as required.
- Better software for working from home.

What support do you need from government? (70 responses)

- Tax relief, support for those who may be unable to pay PAYG instalments due to reduction in work.
- Clearer JobSeeker and JobKeeper information and application processes for sole traders (and employers).
- Options for those who are not eligible for JobKeeper program (because employer is not eligible).
- Consideration of freelancers alongside any support provided to casual workers.
- Small business emergency support grants and other small business grants for COVID-19 situation – very good.
- Rental tenancy protection.
- Include the arts and non-ABN freelancers in stimulus packages.
- Financial support that recognises irregular freelance income (e.g. proving 30% drop in turnover in a 'comparable' period for JobKeeper depends on when one happened to be paid previously).
- Prompt payment and outreach for work offerings.
- Safety nets for anyone financially affected, including freelancers.
- Funding to retain employees and support to do business development until economy turns.
- Support for universities.
- Extend JobKeeper to all self-employed, without a 30% drop in income requirement.
- Don't close businesses or infringe on people's liberties. Report deaths honestly (deaths from, not deaths with). Develop a response that preserves people's livelihood and freedoms. The virus is a small threat: the government and the lockdown is a large one.

- Subsidies for sole traders.
- Clearer guidance and a timetable based on specific indicators; e.g. when new cases drop below 2, restrictions will be eased.
- Tax breaks; increased work-from-home deductions.
- Financial, to treat NEIS participants the same as other low-income earners.
- Offers of freelance writing and editing work that small businesses like mine can do from home (as opposed to having to apply for new permanent positions located within government organisations).
- JobKeeper restricts editors who have only just started earning a living from their profession, other options needed.
- As above, information about what financial support might be available for sole traders, including eligibility criteria. Also, if possible, perhaps government could generate work to support its regular contractors. For example, commissioning work that there is not time for during busier periods.
- Support for freelance workers who have experienced a dramatic drop in work and income. Reducing lag time for clients to pay small businesses.
- More support for the publishing industry in general.
- Certainty about continued operation of bookshops and supply chains, financial support to protect cashflow.
- They have done well already. More of the same if we are in lockdown for longer.
- Recognition of other categories for casuals.
- Give a proposed date for the end of travel restrictions.
- Retraining opportunities.

What other types of support do you need? (35 responses)

- Practical information about mental, physical and wellbeing effects that editors may be experiencing and available supports.
- These are still 'early days' for assessing, understanding, and responding creatively to, the impacts of the pandemic on working life. As such, specific ideas for support will be needed, and become clearer, as 2020 unfolds.
- Until the restrictions are lifted and the economy starts to pick up, can't see change to current situation. But this may be an opportunity to upskill with online courses/study.
- Business as usual for me.
- Suggested online professional development courses.
- Free training in a wide range of online technologies and free access to use of such would be handy.
- At this time I don't feel I need any additional support.
- I am fortunate in that I have a particular skill set in the IT field that has allowed me to find work. It is loosely related to my editing work but involves leading a team of technical specialists and I am the 'middle person' between them and our large government employer.
- I need work!
- I am OK for the moment. IPEd connection is helpful. Thank you.
- Businesses: unless a business has practical help to offer (e.g. banks offering financial assistance), stop sending out COVID-19 updates to show you 'care'.
- Keeping up social contact -- that's my responsibility!

- Recommending my services or introducing freelancers to corporate clients who require editors right now.
- Obtaining paid employment.
- I don't think IPEd can or necessarily should do anything at this time for my specific circumstances.
- I don't know what supports are available.

**Survey conclusion**

The survey concluded with a request for the contact details of anyone prepared to provide de-identified case studies about the effects COVID-19 has had on them, as editors and individuals. The case studies will aim to provide concrete examples of the impacts on the mental, physical, financial, social and familial circumstances that editors are experiencing, as per the information people choose to share. The case studies will be a valuable part of IPEd's ongoing advocacy for members and the industry. Fourteen IPEd members have volunteered their details and we thank them for their support.

Further information in response to the feedback received will be forthcoming.