Intellectual Freedom Manual

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TRINA MAGI is a library professor and reference and instruction librarian at the University of Vermont. She has chaired state and regional intellectual freedom committees, served on the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, and published a number of articles on privacy. She has won several awards for her intellectual freedom advocacy.

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1. **Create a culture** that supports intellectual freedom by regularly talking about it with users, coworkers, employees, administrators, legislators, and governing bodies. Don’t wait for a crisis to educate them about the library profession’s principles. Meet with other organizations and individuals in your community, and form partnerships around common interests.

2. **Develop written policies** that support intellectual freedom in the following areas: collection development and resource reconsideration, Internet use, meeting rooms and exhibit spaces, privacy and confidentiality, and user behavior.

3. **Formally adopt these core ALA statements** as policy for your library: *Libraries: An American Value, Library Bill of Rights, Code of Ethics of the American Library Association*, and *The Freedom to Read* statement. Frame and prominently post the *Library Bill of Rights* on the walls and on the library website for users to see.

4. **Consult this manual** to learn about best practices for supporting intellectual freedom, and for tools to respond to concerns and challenges.

5. **Ask for help** if you need it. If you’re facing a challenge or concern and need help, contact your state intellectual freedom committee or the American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom at (800) 545-2433, ext. 4223.
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**TRINA MAGI** is a library professor and reference and instruction librarian at the University of Vermont. She has chaired state and regional intellectual freedom committees, served on the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, and published a number of articles on privacy. She has won several awards for her intellectual freedom advocacy.

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BEGINNING WITH THE first edition published in 1974, the Intellectual Freedom Manual has served as an essential reference book for librarians seeking information and guidance in applying the principles of intellectual freedom to library service. It is published under the direction of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom. Additional information about intellectual freedom issues can be found on the ALA “Intellectual Freedom” website (www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom). Check the website regularly to find the latest news and to see newly adopted and revised ALA policies.

Scope

Like previous editions, the ninth edition contains current ALA intellectual freedom policies and guidelines; essays on intellectual freedom issues, principles, and law; and practical help for librarians and trustees.

New to this edition are:

- “Issue at a Glance” pages, which provide a summary of important points related to each intellectual freedom issue
- Information about copyright
- Information about responding to requests from law enforcement
- A step-by-step checklist for responding to challenges to library resources
- An essay about intellectual freedom and young people
- An essay about the law regarding libraries and labeling and rating systems (e.g., Motion Picture Association of America movie ratings)
• Expanded content about developing library policies that support intellectual freedom
• Expanded content about Internet filtering
• An expanded “Glossary of Terms”
• “Prisoners’ Right to Read: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights,” approved by the ALA Council in June 2010, after the last edition of the manual went to press.

Those familiar with previous editions of the manual will note the absence of historical essays related to the various policy statements. These have been updated and published in a separate volume titled A History of ALA Policy on Intellectual Freedom: A Supplement to the Intellectual Freedom Manual.

Arrangement

This edition is arranged in a new way. Interviews and usability testing of the Intellectual Freedom Manual with librarians revealed the need to reorganize the book. The new topical arrangement and the addition of easy-to-read summaries are intended to help readers find information quickly, especially those readers who are less familiar with the content or are faced with a crisis. Readers who are more familiar with ALA policy statements are encouraged to use the index and “Appendix 3” to quickly identify the location of a particular statement in the manual.

Part I, “Intellectual Freedom and Libraries,” provides foundational information. It begins with an essay that defines intellectual freedom and explains how it applies to school, public, and academic libraries. Core intellectual freedom documents of ALA, such as the Library Bill of Rights, are presented next, followed by practical information about how to create library policies that support intellectual freedom.

Part II, “Intellectual Freedom Issues and Best Practices,” contains nine chapters focusing on intellectual freedom issues: (1) access, (2) censorship, (3) children and youth, (4) collection development, (5) copyright, (6) meeting rooms and exhibit spaces, (7) privacy, (8) requests from law enforcement, and (9) workplace speech. Each chapter begins with a summary called “Issue at a Glance,” covering key concepts, points of law, additional resources, tips for various types of libraries, and questions for reflection. “Issue at a Glance” is followed by relevant “Official ALA Policy Statements” (e.g., interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights), which articulate the association’s principles and best practices. These statements have been developed by ALA committees.
and ratified by the ALA Council. Finally, each chapter includes “A Deeper Look”—one or more essays expanding on the issue. Many of the “Deeper Look” essays provide information about laws related to library operations. This information is not intended as legal advice. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent legal professional should be sought.

Part III, “Advocacy and Assistance,” offers practical information about how to communicate about intellectual freedom, work with the media, lobby legislators, get help, and get involved in promoting and defending intellectual freedom.

The appendixes include a “Glossary of Terms,” “Selected Bibliography,” and a list of official ALA policy statements related to intellectual freedom.

How to Use the Manual

- **Refer to it when developing library policy**—Review “Creating Intellectual Freedom Policies for Your Library” (part I, chapter 3) for guidance in creating five essential intellectual freedom policies.
- **Turn to it for guidance when a question or problem emerges**—Consult the relevant chapter in “Intellectual Freedom Issues and Best Practices” (part II), review the tips in “Communicating about Intellectual Freedom” (part III, chapter 1), and consult “Where to Get Help and Get Involved” (part III, chapter 2) if you need additional help.
- **Use it to orient new employees, volunteers, and trustees**—Ask them to read “What Is Intellectual Freedom?” (part I, chapter 1) and “Core Intellectual Freedom Documents of the American Library Association” (part I, chapter 2).
- **Use it for professional development**—Consider having library staff, volunteers, and trustees read the chapters in “Intellectual Freedom Issues and Best Practices” (part II), and schedule times to discuss the “Questions for Reflection” provided. Some of the questions are easily answered after reading the chapter; others present more difficult ethical challenges that are likely to stimulate interesting discussions.
- **Use it as a textbook in library and information science courses**—Use the “Questions for Reflection” listed at the beginning of each chapter in “Intellectual Freedom Issues and Best Practices” (part II) as writing prompts or to start class discussions. Assign readings from the companion publication, *A History of ALA Policy on Intellectual Freedom*:
A Supplement to the Intellectual Freedom Manual, to help students understand the development and evolution of ALA policy on intellectual freedom.

- Use it to connect with other librarians and help promote intellectual freedom—Read “Where to Get Help and Get Involved” (part III, chapter 2) to learn about organizations, committees, programs, and awards that focus on intellectual freedom.

The library profession has a long history of defending and promoting freedom of expression and the freedom to read. It is our hope that librarians and library supporters will find this new edition of the Intellectual Freedom Manual a valuable and easy-to-use resource as they continue this important work.

—Trina Magi
Editor, ninth edition
Censorship, Challenged Resources, and Internet Filtering

Key Concepts

- Individuals have a right to express their opinions about library resources and services.
- Libraries should select resources according to their collection development policies, and they should have formal procedures for reconsideration of challenged resources. Challenged resources should remain in the collection during the reconsideration process, and resources that meet the criteria for selection should not be removed.
- Resources should not be removed from the collection because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval or because of the origin, background, or views of the author(s) or creator(s).
- The use of Internet filters to block constitutionally protected speech, including content on social networking and gaming sites, compromises First Amendment freedoms and the core values of librarianship. Internet safety for children and adults is best addressed through educational programs that teach people how to find and evaluate information.

Need help handling a challenge?

- Contact the intellectual freedom committee of your state or regional library association. Consult the ALA Office for “Intellectual Freedom” website (www.ala.org/oif) for contact information.
- Contact the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom at (800) 545–2433, ext. 4223.
What Does the Law Say?

- The U.S. Constitution protects free expression and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The Supreme Court has held that the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution requires a procedure to examine critically all challenged expression before it can be suppressed.
- Libraries that do not receive funding for Internet access through the E-rate discount program or LSTA grants are not subject to the Children’s Internet Protection Act and are not required to use Internet filters. No library is required to seek or accept such funding.
- “Pornography” is not a legal term. It is frequently used to refer to materials that are sexually explicit or considered by some to be objectionable, but often those materials are protected by the First Amendment. In contrast, “obscenity” and “child pornography” are terms of law, and materials so designated by a court of law are not protected by the First Amendment. “Harmful to minors” is a legal term identifying sexually themed materials that are constitutionally protected for adults but are restricted for minors. (Please see the “Glossary of Terms” for definitions.)

Creating Policy for Your Library

- Consider formally adopting the Library Bill of Rights and the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association as policy for your library (see part I, chapter 2). They contain statements about resisting censorship and not removing materials based on partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- Be sure you have a collection development policy that covers resources in all formats, including online resources and websites, and that you follow it (see part I, chapter 3).
- In your collection development policy, include a procedure for reconsideration of challenged resources (see part I, chapter 3).
Especially for Academic Libraries

- Academic libraries are sometimes pressured to remove resources that are considered “unscholarly,” “pseudoscience,” or offensive to groups (e.g., Holocaust denial literature). Academic libraries usually include these holdings for the purpose of studying the controversy or for the historical record.
- See also “Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries” in part II, chapter 1.

Especially for Public Libraries

- As challenges often start at the front desk or in the shelves, it’s important that all staff members understand the library’s reconsideration policy and know the proper procedures for responding to a library user’s concerns. It’s also important to educate the library’s governing body about the process and why public libraries include materials that may be considered controversial.

Especially for School Libraries

- The courts have distinguished between a school board’s control over materials used in the curriculum (used by all students) and those within the school library collection, which is a “marketplace of ideas” (Right to Read Defense Committee v. School Committee of the City of Chelsea). If a resource has been selected using a school’s collection development policy, it should not be removed without due process.
- School libraries should guard against filtering the Internet beyond the requirements of CIPA and state law and thereby restricting students’ access to constitutionally protected resources. School districts should have a process for unblocking sites that do not include images that are obscene, child pornography, or defined by a court of law as “harmful to minors.”
- Public school libraries should guard against “viewpoint discrimination,” the act of favoring or promoting materials that advance a particular point of view on a potentially controversial topic. School libraries should provide access to resources that present a range of views on such topics.
To Learn More

- Visit the ALA “Intellectual Freedom” website (www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom) for links to information about censorship, challenges, Internet filtering, and banned books.

Questions for Reflection

- What are the steps in your reconsideration process? How frequently is the process reviewed with staff?
- How does Internet filtering differ from making selection decisions for library materials?
- The author of a popular and controversial nonfiction book admits to falsifying some of her data. You have multiple copies in your collection. What do you do?
Challenged Resources

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights


LIBRARIES: AN AMERICAN VALUE states, “We protect the rights of individuals to express their opinions about library resources and services.” The American Library Association declares as a matter of firm principle that it is the responsibility of every library to have a clearly defined written policy for collection development that includes a procedure for review of challenged resources. Collection development applies to print and media resources or formats in the physical collection. It also applies to digital resources such as databases, e-books and other downloadable and streaming media.

Content filtering is not equivalent to collection development. Content filtering is exclusive, not inclusive, and cannot effectively curate content or mediate access to resources available on the Internet. This should be addressed separately in the library’s acceptable use policy. These policies reflect the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights and are approved by the appropriate governing authority.

Challenged resources should remain in the collection and accessible during the review process. The Library Bill of Rights states in Article I that “Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation,” and in Article II, that “Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.” Freedom of expression is protected by the Constitution of the United States, but constitutionally protected expression is often separated from unprotected expression only by a dim and uncertain line. The Supreme Court has held that the Constitution requires a procedure designed to examine critically all challenged expression before it can be suppressed. This procedure should be open, transparent, and conform to all applicable open meeting and public records laws. Resources that meet the criteria for selection and inclusion within the collection should not be removed.
Therefore, any attempt, be it legal or extra-legal, to regulate or suppress resources in libraries must be closely scrutinized to the end that protected expression is not abridged.

NOTES


2. “Extra-legal” refers to actions that are not regulated or sanctioned by law. These can include attempts to remove or suppress materials by library staff and library board members that circumvent the library’s collection development policy, or actions taken by elected officials or library board members outside the established legal process for making legislative or board decisions. “Legal process” includes challenges to library materials initiated and conducted pursuant to the library’s collection development policy, actions taken by legislative bodies or library boards during official sessions or meetings, or litigation undertaken in courts of law with jurisdiction over the library and the library’s governing body.

Expurgation of Library Resources

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights


EXPURGATING LIBRARY RESOURCES is a violation of the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights. Expurgation as defined by this interpretation includes any deletion, excision, alteration, editing, or obliteration of any part of a library resource by administrators, employees, governing authorities, parent institutions (if any), or third party vendors when done for the purposes of censorship. Such action stands in violation of Articles I, II, and III of the Library Bill of Rights, which state that “Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation,” “Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval,” and “Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.”

The act of expurgation denies access to the complete work and the entire spectrum of ideas that the work is intended to express. This is censorship. Expurgation based on the premise that certain portions of a work may be harmful to minors is equally a violation of the *Library Bill of Rights*.

Expurgation without permission from the rights holder may violate the copyright provisions of the United States Code.

The decision of rights holders to alter or expurgate future versions of a work does not impose a duty on librarians to alter or expurgate earlier versions of a work. Librarians should resist such requests in the interest of historical preservation and opposition to censorship. Furthermore, librarians oppose expurgation of resources available through licensed collections. Expurgation of any library resource imposes a restriction, without regard to the rights and desires of all library users, by limiting access to ideas and information.

**A DEEPER LOOK**

How to Respond to Challenges and Concerns about Library Resources

**Kristin Pekoll and Helen R. Adams**

**LIBRARIES ARE THE** only place dedicated to serving the information needs of everyone in the community. As such, they collect and make available a wide variety of information resources representing the range of human thought and experience. With such a wide spectrum of ideas and information available, it is inevitable that people will occasionally encounter resources they believe to be offensive or inappropriate. They may complain and request that such resources be removed. Below are step-by-step suggestions about how to respond.

These suggestions are not enough, however. Every library should have a collection development policy approved by its governing body. In addition to outlining the process and criteria for selecting resources, the policy should describe the procedure the library staff will follow when a user requests that a resource be reconsidered. (See part I, chapter 3, for guidelines about writing policy.) Having a policy and procedure in place will help library staff deal confidently and fairly with users who express concerns.
Throughout the process, it is critically important that library workers remain calm, respectful, and courteous. There is no reason to become defensive when a complaint is made. Not only is this counterproductive, but it runs counter to library efforts to encourage user involvement.

If the library has no collection development policy with a review process, affirm the principles of intellectual freedom found in the *Library Bill of Rights* as you respond to the challenge. Two relevant ALA documents to read are “Challenged Resources: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*” (see part II, chapter 2) and “Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*” (see part II, chapter 3).

All challenges, regardless of the source, should be handled in the same way and in accordance with policy. Do not make exceptions in the reconsideration process based on whether the challenge is submitted by a member of the public or by a library worker or volunteer.

### Oral Complaints and Expressions of Concern

Oral complaints can occur at any time. Library workers and educators who receive such expressions of concern should courteously refer them to the person responsible for responding to concerns, who should take the following steps:

1. Acknowledge that every person has the right to question library resources, and a library user with a complaint should feel confident that her concerns will be taken seriously. Listen thoughtfully and respectfully. Try to elicit the specific reason for her concern, whether she has read the entire work or only parts, and the specific action she would like library staff to take.

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**What Is a Challenge?**

A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict resources, based on the objections of a person or group. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others. Challenges sometimes lead to censorship. In 1986 the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee developed definitions to clarify terminology associated with challenges, and revised those definitions in 2014. Please see the "challenges" entry in the "Glossary of Terms" for definitions of the following:

- Expression of concern/oral complaint
- Challenge
- Request for reconsideration
- Public challenge
- Censorship

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2. Do not make promises of taking action or appear to agree with the individual. Instead, offer assistance in finding something else that would better meet the person’s needs.

3. If the person requests the item be removed from the library’s collection, explain that although the individual may be offended by the library resource, others may not have the same perspective. Describe how library materials are selected. Libraries have diverse collections with materials from many points of view, and a library’s mission is to provide access to information for all users. All library users have the First Amendment right to borrow, read, view, and listen to library resources.

4. If the individual is concerned about a children’s or young adult resource, explain that parents and guardians play the major role in guiding their children’s or wards’ reading and library use. Often a person’s concern about a children’s or young adult book involves a desire to “protect all children” by removing that item from the collection or restricting access to it. Explain that each family has the right to determine which library materials are acceptable for its children and must accord the same right to other parents.

5. Many expressions of concern end after the individual has had an opportunity to express personal feelings about a library resource. The person only wanted to be heard and have his opinions acknowledged. No further action is needed. If this is the case, thank the person for his interest, make notes about the conversation, and file them for future reference. Additionally, report the conversation to the library director or principal.
6. If the concerned individual is not satisfied during the discussion and wants the item removed, explain the formal reconsideration process and its time line. Often persons who have a concern would like immediate action and are not aware of the length of time this procedure takes. State what your policy says about the availability of the material during the reconsideration process. Best practice is that the material under reconsideration will not be removed from use or have access restricted pending completion of the process.

7. Provide a copy of the library’s collection development policy and reconsideration form. Stress that no action is taken unless the form is fully completed, signed (identifying the individual or group), and submitted. Explain that the submission of a completed form will trigger the formal reconsideration process, and that the document will become part of the public record.

8. After the conversation, make notes about the conversation, date them, and retain the information to provide background in the event that a request for formal reconsideration form is filed. Remember that all such notes become part of the record of the reconsideration process and may become public records.

9. Keep your director or principal informed of any concerns expressed, whether you feel they have been successfully resolved or not. Knowing that a concern was expressed helps that individual respond knowledgeably if the concerned person contacts her.

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**When the Reconsideration Process Is Subverted or Undermined**

If after discussing the legal and ethical reasons for following the reconsideration process, the principal or library director does not follow policy and removes the challenged resource (or one about which a concern has been raised), how far should a librarian go to defend a library resource?

This is a personal, ethical decision, and the librarian must weigh what else can be done. If the director or principal is adamant, the librarian may be forced to evaluate the risk of retaliation from his supervisor or losing a job against the merits of continuing to oppose censorship by a supervisor. After considering the situation carefully, he may come to acknowledge that he has done all that is possible at this time, or he may decide that taking a principled stand is better for him.

The process can also be compromised if the concerned individual or group goes around the policy structure to speak directly to a higher authority such as an alderman, school superintendent, or school board members. Although the public official or school administrator should remind the challenger that there is a review process in place, this does not always occur.
Formal Written Requests for Reconsideration

If the library receives a completed reconsideration form, the person or group designated in library policy to handle challenges should take the following steps:

1. Respond quickly to the individual, acknowledging that the formal reconsideration request has been received, restating the steps in the process, and reviewing the time line.

2. Review the complaint carefully. Was the form completed by an individual with personal concerns or a person representing a group? Look at the reason(s) for the challenge. Has the individual read the entire resource or only specified parts? What action is the person requesting? Does the person seek to have the resource removed from the collection, restricted (e.g., requiring minors to provide written permission from a parent or guardian), reclassified and moved to a different location (e.g., young-adult to adult section or middle school to high school library), or another action such as labeling the book to alert potential readers (e.g., “sexually explicit” or “mature”)?

3. Prepare a one-page document overviewing for the library director or the school’s principal/superintendent the book’s title, summary of the plot or content, selection criteria met by the resource, list of positive reviews, awards received, and a brief summary of the reconsideration process.

Working with the Media

At any time, others may become aware of a library challenge, from word of mouth about a verbal complaint, from a blog by the individual or group who filed the challenge, or from a board agenda posted publicly in the community. The concerned individual(s) may use the media to share their viewpoint and attempt to sway public opinion. Rumors and opinions can escalate a challenge into a media wildfire.

In these circumstances, it is important that the library or school district speak with one official voice: the library director, principal, superintendent, or other designated spokesperson. Everyone else on the library or school staff should decline to make statements or answer questions and should refer media inquiries to the spokesperson. The common talking point for all libraries involved in a challenge is the freedom to read and access to information.

When appropriate, as the challenge becomes public, library and school district administrators may seek the support of local media. Informing local civic organizations of the facts and enlisting their support may counter negative, one-sided media coverage with moderate, tempered discussion. See part III, chapter 1, for more information about working with the media and dealing with controversy and negative publicity.
sideration process. For your knowledge, it is helpful to determine how often the resource has been checked out and how many libraries in the local area, the school district, or the state own the resource.

4. Meet with the library director or the school’s principal to discuss the challenge and how to proceed. Review the reconsideration process with him to ensure that the board-approved policy is followed. If an administrator is tempted to acquiesce to a demand to remove a library resource without due process, explain the legal and ethical issues involved. Circumventing policy may put a school district or library in legal jeopardy of a lawsuit if a library resource is removed without following the official reconsideration process. Such action also sends the message that the policy does not matter, and it is easy to remove a resource from a library—a message that can easily spread. The Code of Ethics of the American Library Association directs library professionals to “uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.”

5. Follow your library’s reconsideration procedure exactly, even if it seems outdated, redundant, or incorrect. The procedure can be updated later. The review process must be transparent and objective, and should include the following general steps. (Review the boxes that follow this list of steps for more detail about how challenges are typically handled in public, school, and academic libraries.)

- Read or reread the book or listen to or view the work in question.
- Determine if the resource meets the selection criteria in the library’s collection development policy.
- Decide whether or not the resource will be retained.
- Send a written letter informing the person of the decision. Address the letter to the individual; do not use an impersonal form letter. Explain how she may appeal the decision if desired, and inform her that appealing the decision will require disclosing the complaint on the agenda of the entity that handles appeals, and in other documents.

6. Update staff in your library or school about the reconsideration process, but be aware of the potential for open records requests. Keep personal opinions and emotional responses out of all official communications. Paper and electronic documents can be obtained and viewed by anyone who submits a request through the proper channels. If you have questions, check with the library’s legal counsel.
7. When the final decision about the questioned resource has been made, keep a record of the event, and report the result to the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom using its Online Challenge Reporting Form, available at www.ala.org/bbooks/challengedmaterials/reporting. OIF will keep confidential the details of the challenge, using the information only for statistical purposes.

If You Hold a Public Hearing . . .

If a challenge rises to the level of an appeal, your library’s reconsideration process may or may not call for a public hearing by your governing board as part of the appeal process. If it does, the following tips may be helpful.

Before the Hearing:

- Brief members of the governing body on:
  - The library collection development policy
  - How the library has responded to the challenge and the decision made
  - Policies and procedures (including open meeting laws) that should be followed
- Have all members of the governing body read, view, or listen to the challenged resource in its entirety.
- Decide ahead of time on the length of the hearing and set definite beginning and ending times.
- Announce the hearing well in advance.
- Prepare a news release covering the facts, and make it available to media representatives who attend or ask questions, along with a copy of the Library Bill of Rights and your library’s collection development policy. It is important that the media and the public understand that the library’s decisions are not arbitrary, but based on a great deal of work, thought, and consultation.
- Seek support from ally groups and individuals who can speak in support of the freedom to read, view, and listen, or who can send written expressions of support (e.g., attorneys, educators, students, librarians, ministers, people from the media, your state intellectual freedom committee, local colleges and universities, educational groups).

At the Hearing:

- Distribute copies of the Library Bill of Rights and your library’s collection development policy.
- Ask people who wish to speak to sign in.
- Have the chair of the board preside. At the beginning of the hearing, she should explain the process the governing body will follow and when it will issue its decision.
- Have individuals speak in the order they signed in, and appoint a timekeeper to limit each speaker to a specific amount of time. If you allow participants to speak a second time, do so only after everyone who has registered has had an opportunity to speak.
8. After the challenge is completed, reflect on what was accomplished. For example, if the resource was retained in the collection, users still have access to the information or fiction book. Did you learn something that can be applied to the next challenge? Did you garner new allies? Should lines of communication with civic, religious, educational, or political bodies of the community, and local media be strengthened? Can this experience be used as the basis for library advocacy to the entire community? Also, analyze the reconsideration process for weaknesses and omissions and create a list of possible changes that would improve the process. Meet with the library director or the principal to discuss whether the timing is right for revising the policy.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES
The library’s collection development and reconsideration policy determines who reviews the challenge. For example, the objections may be reviewed by the librarian(s) in charge of the collection or the director, depending on the size of the library. Some library procedures include a formal meeting with the individual, while others take the reconsideration form as explanation enough. The policy generally outlines the basis for review and designates the position or group that makes the decision and informs the initiator of the challenge by letter. The letter should include the decision and information on the library’s appeal process.

If the individual decides to appeal, the item should be placed on the board meeting agenda, and the user should be informed of the date, time, and place of the meeting. Librarians should consult with their attorneys for advice about how to comply with open meeting laws. The board should receive documentation to review before the meeting, including the original written complaint, an overview of the item being challenged (summary, location in the library, reviews, recommended lists, circulation statistics, and local, system, and state ownership details), the librarian’s initial decision, and the letter to the library user informing him of the initial decision. Encourage the board to review the challenged item in its entirety. Offer to obtain copies for anyone who would like to review the resource prior to the public hearing. The board will review and debate the original decision and may or may not invite comment from the user and/or the public according to library procedures. In most cases, the library board’s decision is final.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES
When a fully completed reconsideration form is received, the principal will assemble a reconsideration committee to review the challenged resource. To assist the committee’s work, the librarian should provide a copy of the challenged resource to each committee member, information about the resource (reviews, recommended lists, awards received, how it meets collection development policy selection criteria), and a copy of the form completed by the individual initiating the challenge. The committee should discuss and weigh the merits and deficiencies of the work in relation to its intended educational, recreational, personal, or extracurricular purposes and use by students and make a written decision to the superintendent to retain, remove, or move the challenged work to another level. The concerned individual will receive a copy of the reconsideration committee’s written decision (usually sent by the superintendent, principal, or other administrator who served on the reconsideration committee), and if not satisfied, she may appeal the decision to the school board.

If there is an appeal, the school board will make the final decision on the disposition of the challenged work at a board meeting. The person bringing the challenge will be informed of the date, time, and place. Prior to the special meeting, the superintendent should review with board members their role and responsibilities. Each should receive a packet of information that includes a copy of the work (or an opportunity to review it), the selection and reconsideration policy, a summary of the work’s content, reviews, recommended lists, awards received, an analysis of how the work meets collection development policy selection criteria, the reconsideration form, the written decision of the reconsideration committee, and the letter informing the individual of the committee’s decision. During its special meeting, the board will review and discuss the reconsideration committee’s decision and may invite the individual who submitted the challenge to speak. Additionally, the board may invite public comments, depending on its reconsideration process. Board members will reach a decision, which is final, concluding the reconsideration of the library resource. The superintendent will notify the individual formally by letter of the school board’s decision.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES
Academic libraries should have written policies for handling requests from administrators, faculty and staff members, students, parents, alumni, donors, legislators, or board members to remove books or block access to
controversial content. Such requests should be submitted to the team of people that makes collection development decisions. That team should evaluate the material to determine if it meets the collection development criteria and issue a written response to the person making the request. The response should include information about the library’s appeal process. In academic libraries, appeals are usually handled by the library dean or director.

Book challenges in an academic library are not likely to be about immorality or sexually explicit images. They are likely to be arguments that a particular work is too popular, that it is offensive to women or another group, that the content is not scholarly and is therefore inappropriate for academic research, or that its conclusions are scientifically incorrect or inaccurate. Academic librarians should be aware that the excuse of “unscholarly” may be used to challenge the presence of controversial content in the library. As in public and school libraries, the collection should contain various viewpoints so that library users may learn about and examine them.

NOTES


2. Ibid.

Sample Form

Request for Reconsideration of Library Resources

[In this space, identify who has authorized use of this form (e.g., your library director, board of trustees, board of education, etc.) and to whom the form should be returned.

Example: The school board of Mainstream County, U.S.A., has delegated the responsibility for selection and evaluation of library/educational resources to the school library media specialist/curriculum committee, and has established reconsideration procedures to address concerns about those resources. Completion of this form is the first step in those procedures. If you wish to request reconsideration of school or library resources, please return the completed form to the Coordinator of Library Media Resources, Mainstream School Dist., 1 Mainstream Plaza, Anytown, U.S.A. Please note that this form may become part of the public record.]

Name ____________________________ Date ____________

Address __________________________ City __________________________

State _______ Zip Code _______ Phone __________________________

Do you represent self? _______ Organization? __________________________

Resource on which you are commenting:

_____ Book _____ Textbook _____ Video _____ Display _____ Magazine

_____ Library Program _____ Audio Recording _____ Newspaper

_____ Electronic Information/Network (please specify)

_____ Other __________________________

Title of the resource __________________________

Author/producer of the resource __________________________

What brought this resource to your attention? __________________________

Have you examined the entire resource? __________________________

What concerns you about the resource? (Use other side or additional pages if necessary.) __________________________

Are there resource(s) you suggest to provide additional information and/or other viewpoints on this topic? __________________________
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