

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to the promotion and practice of intellectual freedom. Libraries are essential to democracy and self-government, to personal development and social progress, and to every individual's inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To that end, libraries and library workers should embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion in everything that they do.

“Equity” takes difference into account to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair outcome. Equity recognizes that some groups were (and are) disadvantaged in accessing educational and employment opportunities and are, therefore, underrepresented or marginalized in many organizations and institutions. Equity, therefore, means increasing diversity by ameliorating conditions of disadvantaged groups.

“Diversity” can be defined as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. When we recognize, value, and embrace diversity, we are recognizing, valuing, and embracing the uniqueness of each individual.

“Inclusion” means an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully; are valued for their distinctive skills, experiences, and perspectives; have equal access to resources and opportunities; and can contribute fully to the organization's success.

To ensure that every individual will feel truly welcomed and included, library staff and administrators should reflect the origins, age, background, and views of their community. Governing bodies should also reflect the community. Library spaces, programs, and collections should accommodate the needs of every user.

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

Library collections, in a variety of material formats, should include a full range of viewpoints and experiences, serving the needs of all members of the community. Historically, diverse authors and viewpoints have not been equitably represented in the output of many mainstream publishers and other producers. It may require extra effort to locate, review, and acquire those materials.

Therefore, libraries should seek out alternative, small press, independent, and self-published content in a variety of formats. Libraries may benefit from cooperative arrangements and other partnerships to share in the work of locating and acquiring diverse materials. Interlibrary loan may complement but not substitute for the development of diverse local collections.

All materials, including databases and other electronic content, should be made accessible for people who use adaptive or assistive technology.

To provide equitable and inclusive access, libraries must work closely with diverse communities to understand their needs and aspirations, so that the library can respond

appropriately with collections and services to meet those needs. All community members will feel truly welcomed and included when they see themselves reflected in collections that speak to their cultures and life experiences.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

Beyond merely avoiding the exclusion of materials representing unorthodox or unpopular ideas, libraries should proactively seek to include an abundance of resources and programming representing the greatest possible diversity of genres, ideas, and expressions. A full commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion requires that library collections and programming reflect the broad range of viewpoints and cultures that exist in our world. Socially excluded, marginalized, and underrepresented people, not just the mainstream majority, should be able to see themselves reflected in the resources and programs that libraries offer.¹

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

By challenging censorship, libraries foster an inclusive environment where all voices have the opportunity to be heard. Inclusive materials, programs, and services may not be universally popular, but it is the library's responsibility to provide access to all points of view, not just prevailing opinions. Libraries should prepare themselves to deal with challenges by adopting appropriate policies and procedures. Libraries should respectfully consider community objections and complaints, but should not allow controversy alone to dictate policy.

Governing bodies, administrators, and library workers must discourage self-censorship. Fears and biases may suppress diverse voices in collections, programming, and all aspects of library services.² Libraries should counter censorship by practicing inclusion.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

American society has always encompassed people of diverse origin, age, background, and views. The constitutional principles of free expression and free access to ideas recognize and affirm this diversity. Any attempt to limit free expression or restrict access to ideas threatens the core American values of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Libraries should establish and maintain strong ties to organizations that advocate for the rights of socially excluded, marginalized, and underrepresented people. Libraries should act in solidarity with all groups or individuals resisting attempts to abridge the rights of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

In the Library Bill of Rights and all of its Interpretations and supporting documents, the principle of inclusion is clear and unambiguous.

“Origin” encompasses all of the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in the circumstances of their birth.

“Age” encompasses all of the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in their levels of development and maturity.

“Background” encompasses all of the characteristics of individuals that are a result of their life experiences.

“Views” encompass all of the opinions and beliefs held and expressed by individuals.

Libraries should regularly review their policies with the goal of advancing equity of access to the library’s collections and services. Identification requirements, overdue charges and fees, or deposits for service are examples of traditional approaches that may exclude some members of the community.³

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Libraries should not merely be neutral places for people to share information, but should actively encourage socially excluded, marginalized, and underrepresented people to fully participate in community debates and discussions.

Libraries should welcome diverse content in their exhibit spaces and diverse ideas, individuals, and groups in their meeting rooms, even if some members of the community may object or be offended.⁴

Conclusion

To uphold the Library Bill of Rights and serve the entire community, governing bodies, administrators, and library workers should embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion.

¹ “Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*,” Adopted January 27, 1982, by the ALA Council; amended June 26, 1990; July 12, 2000; June 26, 2018 *under previous name* "Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource"; and June 24, 2019.

² “Diverse Collections: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*,” Adopted July 14, 1982, by the ALA Council; amended January 10, 1990; July 2, 2008; July 1, 2014 *under previous name* "Diversity in Collection Development"; and June 25, 2019.

³ “Economic Barriers to Information Access: An Interpretation to the *Library Bill of Rights*,” Adopted June 30, 1993 by the ALA Council and amended June 25, 2019.

⁴ “Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights,” Adopted July 2, 1991, by the ALA Council; amended June 26, 2018; amended version rescinded August 16, 2018; amended January 29, 2019.

Adopted June 27, 2017 by the ALA Council.

Approved by: RPL Board of Trustees

Approved Date: October 20th, 2022 (*August 17th, 2017*)

Review Schedule: Annual

Next Review Date: October 2023