Intellectual Freedom Issues

Unfortunately libraries come under criticism for what some consider controversial programs, use of meeting rooms by unpopular groups, items selected or not selected for the collection, PR pieces and more. This section on Intellectual Freedom should provide a beginning point to support decisions made by library staff and the board. This topic also includes privacy, the USA Patriot Act and CIPA.


Intellectual Freedom Manual compiled by the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association. 8th ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 2010. Available through Access Pennsylvania Database. This update includes “revised interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights along with key intellectual freedom guidelines and policies, including a new chapter, “Interactivity and the Internet,” and other fresh material on intellectual freedom and privacy in online social networks, an examination of intellectual freedom for disabled library patrons {and} coverage of the latest USA PATRIOT Act debates and extensions.”


American Library Association and the Association of American Publishers issued a “Freedom to Read Statement” that the boards of many libraries endorse.

The “Freedom to View Statement,” originally prepared by the Freedom to View Committee of the American Film and Video Association and subsequently endorsed by the American Library Association should be reviewed by library boards.

Procedures to handle challenges to library collections are often part of a collection maintenance policy. The American Library Association offers aid when a challenge occurs. Divisions of ALA also provide information; for example, YALSA, the Young Adult Library Services Association has sites for intellectual freedom and censorship.

The Oregon State Library maintains the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse through its Library Development Services Department. There is helpful information in dealing with patrons and the media when materials are challenged or other issues pertaining to intellectual freedom arise.
At the American Library Association Conference, July 2009 librarians and library supporters from West Bend, Wisconsin shared their perspective on the protracted censorship challenges going on in their community at the briefing session, “Intellectual Freedom on the Front Lines” sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Committee and the Freedom to Read Foundation.

“Blogging Censorship” comes from the National Coalition Against Censorship which is dedicated to protecting rights and principles guaranteed by the First Amendment. They “report on incidents of censorship and provide support and resources to people facing challenges to freedom of inquiry and expression.”

“The mandate of the AAP Freedom to Read Committee is to protect the free marketplace of ideas for American publishers. The Committee serves as the publishing industry’s watchdog and early warning system on issues such as libel, privacy, school and library censorship, journalist’s privilege and the right to protect confidential sources, Internet censorship, government regulation of protected speech, third-party liability for protected speech, and efforts to punish speech that “causes harm”.

The November-December issue of Library Technology Reports (vol.46, no.8) from ALA TechSource examines privacy and freedom of information in 21st-Century libraries. This special issue was produced in collaboration with The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom and includes contributions from Jason Griffey, Sarah Houghton-Jan, and Eli Neiburger. The print issue is also available through the Access Pennsylvania Database.

Mary Minow prepared a bibliography of web resources, “Social Media, Libraries and the Law: Key Resources” as a handout for the archived webinar with the same title, originally presented March 20, 2011 for Infopeople. The speaker’s slides are also available.

Privacy


“Privacy in an Era of Change,” a video broadcast from the American Library Association Conference, July 2009, is a conversation about privacy under the current administration. It was cosponsored by the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee and the ALA Washington Office with speakers: Mary Ellen Callahan, Chief Privacy Officer for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; David Sobel, Senior Counsel at the
Electronic Frontier Foundation; and Craig Wacker, program officer for the MacArthur Foundation’s Digital Media & Learning initiative.

epic.org is published by the Electronic Privacy Information Center and focuses public attention on emerging privacy and civil liberties issues.

USA Patriot Act

The American Library Association provides links to information about the USA Patriot Act. Note especially its publication, “Confidentiality and Coping with Law Enforcement Inquiries: Guidelines for the Library and its Staff.” Mary Minow, a former librarian who is currently an attorney, prepared a “Library Records Post-Patriot Act Chart.”

This teleconference was sponsored by the American Association of Law Libraries, American Library Association, Association of Research Libraries, Medical Library Association, and Special Libraries Association. Safeguarding Our Patrons’ Privacy: What Every Librarian Needs to Know About the USA PATRIOT Act & Related Anti-terrorism Measures. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2002. Video available through Access Pennsylvania Database. The panel discusses “the USA PATRIOT Act and its impact on the privacy of library users. They identify steps that institutions must take to comply with search warrants, subpoenas, and wire tap requests from law enforcement. They also address the key legal issues and policy implications for libraries in light of legislative and regulatory proposals that impact privacy and First Amendment rights of library patrons.”

The Anti-Defamation League’s “Public Libraries: A New Forum for Extremists” includes an extensive Q & A section.

The Pennsylvania Center for the Book provides information of interest to Pennsylvania librarians.

The Intellectual Freedom Manual from the Florida Library Association is one of many manuals prepared by state associations. It is noteworthy for including a section on RFID.

Children and the Internet

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has compiled “Resources on the Children’s Internet Protection Act,” geared to public and school libraries. Included is specific information about CIPA and E-rate.
The American Library Association developed “The Libraries and Internet Toolkit” which has sections on “Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA),” “Tough Questions on CIPA,” and many other relevant topics.

Examples of Internet Safety Policy statements:

- Mt. Lebanon Public Library, PA
- Erie County Public Library, PA
- Lower Merion Library System, PA
- Dauphin County Library System, PA
- Child Internet Safety Resources for Florida Libraries
- Other examples including those outside of the Commonwealth