Book Challenges and Intellectual Freedom: Proactive Planning for Public Libraries
Today’s Presenters

Amanda Vazquez
Library Director, Dubuque County Library District (IA)

Jennifer Pearson
Director, Marshall County Memorial Library (TN)

Brianna Hoffman
WebJunction Project Coordinator and Executive Director of the Washington Library Association

Amber McLain
Digital Services Specialist, Lakeland Library Cooperative (MI)
BOOK CHALLENGES AND INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

PROACTIVE PLANNING FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Amanda Vazquez

Director, Dubuque County Library District
Iowa Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee Chair
ALA Intellectual Freedom Round Table Chair-Elect
IOWA CHALLENGES LANDSCAPE

- Primarily school library challenges
  - 80:20 school:public
  - Public Library challenges in reaction to School Library controversy

- Non-traditional challenges
  - Intentionally not returning items
  - Challenge to decisions not to include items
  - Flooding staff with challenges - One title or multiple
LIBRARY CHALLENGES LANDSCAPE

- Public library boards
  - Remove power from library board
    - State
      - Legislation proposed to give city councils authority to overrule library board decisions
    - Local
      - Governing to Advisory
LIBRARY CHALLENGES LANDSCAPE

- Public library staff
  - Proposed legislation
    - HF274- Creates penalties for a person affiliated with a public school or library who **knowledgeably provides obscene materials to minors**
    - HF185- Prohibits public libraries and elementary and secondary schools from knowingly **allowing a minor to be exposed to or participate in "inappropriate" programming.**
    - HF2176- Makes it an **aggravated misdemeanor or Class D felony** for a school employee or public librarian to knowingly give obscene material to a minor.
DISCLAIMER: IANAL

- Consult with your own legal resources
  - Applicable Law and Legal Opinions
  - Public Information Board
  - State Library Consultants
  - State Law Librarian
  - City/County Attorney
  - Outside Counsel
LIMIT LEGAL LIABILITY

▪ Know and follow the law and professional best practices
  ▪ ALA Library Privacy Checklists
  ▪ State Library and Association Resources
▪ Educate your Library Board
▪ Train your Library Workers
▪ Implement and follow your policies and procedures
BOARD

- Understand their powers and their limits
- Challenges
  - Part of Policy
- Limiting public comment
- City Attorney works for the City Council
  - Conflicts may arise
- Retain outside counsel that specialized in 1A or library law
  - State Bar Association
  - ACLU
  - Other Attorneys
Amanda Vazquez
▪ 563-582-0008
▪ amandav@dubcolib.org
▪ Twitter @amandarvazquez
Book Bans

Put Me in Coach!
How to effectively activate your team for success

*Yes- It's a sports analogy- but don't worry you'll get it even if you're not a fan of sports ball

Jennifer Pearson
Director, Marshall Co. (TN) Memorial Library
It’s not always the Winner’s Circle

In the current climate we are seeing a lot of challenges to our winning ways in libraries. It helps when we have a good game plan in place to address these challenges...
The Best Defense is a Good Offense

“Eli Manning — New York Giants” by Mike Lizzi (CC BY 2.0)
Ensure your assistant coaches and team management understand the game plan

Assistant coaches = staff
Team management = board
Game plan = collection development policy
Bring in the Fans!

Your fans are

- Patrons
- Friends of the Library
- Community members
- Who else?
When someone questions the game plan

- **The Coach and the Management handle the questions** = making the form; directing the assistants in their role
- **The Assistant Coaches take direction** = make sure they know how to handle a challenge
- **A clear redress must be established** = reconsideration form
How to Win in the End

- Cool heads prevail
- Logic and reason win the day
- Don’t be afraid to throw that Hail Mary
Book Challenges
The Role of the Association

BRIANNA HOFFMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WASHINGTON LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
Associations and Partners

THINK NATIONAL
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (ALA)

THINK LOCAL
STATE LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
OTHER POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIP & SUPPORT
Think National – ALA

Report Censorship
Defend the Public’s Freedoms
www.ala.org/challengereporting

THE MERRITT FUND

Unite Against Book Bans
Think Local – State Library Associations

TOOLKITS  RESOURCES  CONNECTIONS
Thinking Outside the Box

- Library Association Lobbyist
- State Library
- State and Local Government Offices
- EveryLibrary
Thinking Outside the Box

- City Council
- School Superintendents/Administration
- Community Members
What About Boards?

“Library Lovers”

Engaged Patrons

Library Board

Advocates
BRIANNA HOFFMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WASHINGTON LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BRIANNA@WLA.ORG
Amber McLain
Digital Services Specialist, Lakeland Library Cooperative (MI)
Previous Director, Patmos Library (MI)
Staff Roles In Challenges

These roles will vary

● Depending on the size and structure of your library
● Your library may not have all roles
● Some roles may be merged into one
Staff Roles In Challenges

Library Pages/Shelvers

- These roles most often encounter patrons on the floor and should listen empathetically to the complaints and give excellent customer service.
- If the patron still wishes to complain, they should direct them to the appropriate place.
Staff Roles In Challenges

Library Assistants (Circulation, Reference), Librarians

- When a complaint is brought to the attention of Library Assistants or Librarians, they should listen to the patron, just as the Library Page. If the patron still wishes to complain, they should be provided with a packet including: the Library’s Collection Development Policy, the Policy for Request for Reconsideration, the Library Bill of Rights, the Freedom to Read Statement, and the Reconsideration Form last.
Staff Roles In Challenges

Managers, Library Director

- If a Request for Reconsideration is filed, it should be escalated to the level of management outlined in the Library’s Collection Development and Request for Reconsideration Policies.
- Policies must be followed to a T, every time.
- Typically, Branch Managers or Library Directors will be responsible for responding to the complaint with a decision in a certain amount of time.
- Once the patron is notified, all appeals should be handled by the Library Board where applicable.
Empathetic Listening

- Be attentive
- Pay attention to body language
- Ask open-ended questions
- Request clarification
- Acknowledge feelings
- Don’t react, just listen
De-Escalation Techniques

- Pause
- Respond, don’t react
- Keep body language open and neutral
- Ignore challenges and loaded questions
- Validate feelings & experiences
- Don’t take it personally
The Toll of Challenges

● Challenges of all varieties come with some sort of cost
● At the very least, there is the cost of time and effort
● There is also the emotional and psychological cost
● Following steps and reaching out can lessen these costs
● Having a strong foundation and preparedness plan for challenges can bring all levels together and allow for better communication across the board