

# Handbook on Intellectual Freedom

Revised Edition

2003



Produced by the Michigan Library Association's  
Intellectual Freedom Committee

## Introduction

Intellectual Freedom is the right of every individual to any information they seek regardless of the subject, format or philosophy expressed. Intellectual Freedom is at the heart of librarianship and the library is the most available and important point of access to information for all. Intellectual Freedom cannot exist as long as the right to information is challenged by censorship and any library may be a target of censorship.

The Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Michigan Library Association has compiled the Intellectual Freedom Handbook to provide information on preparing for censors and effectively handling them.

If your library experiences censorship, report the incident to the MLA Intellectual Freedom Committee. Incident reporting allows the committee to offer assistance to libraries facing book challenges and to track the frequency and type of challenges. All information will be kept confidential and used to track incident statistics. No release of information that would identify a specific challenge incident would be made without express prior permission of the library involved.

To report an incident to the Intellectual Freedom Committee, complete the Intellectual Freedom Incident Report on page 11 of this manual and send it to:

Michigan Library Association  
1407 Rensen St. #2  
Lansing, MI 48910

You may also submit an online incident report to the MLA Intellectual Freedom Committee at [www.mla.lib.mi.us/units/committee/ic/index.html](http://www.mla.lib.mi.us/units/committee/ic/index.html). Click on the “Intellectual Freedom Incident Report” link.

You should also contact the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom at 1-800-545-2433, ext. 4223. More information and contact information for OIF can be found at [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org). Click on “Issues and Advocacy” and follow the links to Intellectual Freedom.

The revision of this Intellectual Freedom Handbook was prepared by members of the Michigan Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee. Comments, questions and concerns regarding this handbook should be directed to the Committee in care of the Michigan Library Association office.

Credit is given to the Florida Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee for use of ideas found in the “Dealing with Complaints” section.

## Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- 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.
- 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.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment 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.
- VI. Libraries that 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.

*—Adopted June 18, 1948.*

*—Amended February 2, 1961, and January 23, 1980,  
inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996, by the ALA Council.*

## **The Librarian's Code of Ethics**

1. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased and courteous responses to all requests.
2. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
3. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
4. We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.
5. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
6. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues or our employing institutions.
7. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties, and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
8. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

*—Adopted by the ALA Council June 28, 1995*

## **Censorship**

Censorship is the intentional suppression or restriction of ideas by the review of publications, plays, recordings, electronic formats or other media.

### **Materials Selection Policy**

The reason for a materials selection policy is to provide a statement of the library's philosophy and goals, contributing to the overall planning of the library. It helps guide collection growth and development by setting priorities. It establishes criteria for selection and ongoing evaluation of the collection. A written materials selection policy is essential to have on hand when a censor threatens library materials.

#### **Key Elements of a Materials Selection Policy**

- The library's mission and goals, including how they meet the needs of the library community
- Library selection criteria, including relevance to community, existing subject coverage within library, authority of author, critical reviews, accuracy, suitability or format for library use, price and popular demand. Also indicate who is responsible for collection development.
- The library policy regarding gifts, including their acceptance and disposal.
- Special procedures for handling materials in various formats (video and audio cassettes, computer software, etc.), materials for particular groups (children, visually impaired, etc.) and special collections.
- The library policy regarding weeding of materials and inventories.
- The text of the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement, issued by the American Library Association and the Association of American Publishers (available in the ALA "Intellectual Freedom Manual" or as a single copy from the Office of Intellectual Freedom).
- The procedure for handling complaints and a copy of the library's Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Form, page 8.

## **Before the Problem Begins**

Take care to clarify policies on selection and censorship, and to establish good community relations. This type of planning will diffuse many potential challenges. Prepare with the following steps:

1. Maintain a materials selection policy. It should be in written form and approved by the appropriate governing authority. It should apply to all library materials equally.
2. Maintain a clearly defined method for handling complaints. The complaint must be filed in writing (see sample of Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Form, Page 8), and the complainant must be properly identified before action is taken. A decision should be deferred until fully considered by appropriate administrative authority.
3. Maintain in-service training. Conduct periodic in-service training to acquaint staff, administration and the governing authority with the materials selection policy, method for handling complaints, and resources available through the ALA.
4. Maintain lines of communication with civic, religious, educational and political bodies in the community. Library board and staff participation in local civic organizations and presentations to these organizations should emphasize the library's selection and intellectual freedom principles.
5. Maintain a vigorous public information program on behalf of intellectual freedom. Newspapers, radio and television should be informed of policies governing materials selection and use, and of any special activities pertaining to intellectual freedom.
6. Maintain familiarity with any local municipal and state legislation pertaining to intellectual freedom and First Amendment rights.

## Dealing with Complaints

In the event that an individual or group attempts to have any materials restricted or removed, the following steps are recommended:

1. Try to resolve the complaint informally at the point of initial contact, usually at the circulation or reference desk. Listen to the patron's objections in a calm, courteous, reasonable manner, seeking to defuse the situation without committing the library to any specific course of action. (Often patrons merely want to "blow off steam" and have no intention of lodging an official complaint: it is estimated that 90 percent of complaints about library materials are deterred informally.)
2. If the patron insists on pursuing the complaint, refer the patron to the librarian designated to handle such problems. The librarian should explain the library's materials selection policy, and its position on collection development and intellectual freedom.
3. If the situation cannot be resolved through discussion with the complainant, initiate the reconsideration procedures as set forth in the library's materials selection policy. (See Materials Selection Policy section in this handbook.)
4. Notify administration and/or the governing authority of the complaint. Present full, written information giving the nature of the complaint and identifying the source.
5. If the incident becomes a public issue, seek the support of the local media. Freedom to read and freedom of the press go hand in hand. Local civic organizations can also be enlisted for support. Meet negative pressure with positive pressure.
6. Contact the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Michigan Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee, completing the Intellectual Freedom Incident Form (see reproducible form on Page 8). While censorship must be opposed at the local level, there is value in the support and assistance of agencies outside the area, which have no personal involvement. They can often cite parallel cases and suggest methods of responding to a challenge.

## Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Library materials concerned:

Book

Periodical

Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Author or producer \_\_\_\_\_

Did you read, view or listen to the entire work?

Yes

No

How did you come to select this material? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Was this required material for you?

Yes

No

## **Access to Online Resources**

The right of free access to information for all individuals is basic to every aspect of library service.

Since, in a free society, there is no place for censorship, and as libraries we facilitate access and do not judge content, we affirm the following principles:

1. It is in the public interest to provide the broadest possible access to online services, as these services have proven to be and will become a most effective democratic means of communicating.
2. It is our professional responsibility to resist constraints to the access this medium provides.
3. It is our professional responsibility to contest, by all lawful means, encroachments upon public access to online resources.
4. It is our professional responsibility to respect each user's right to privacy while accessing online resources.

## Role of Trustees

In meeting challenges to intellectual freedom, public library trustees play three major roles:

1. **Role of Policymaker**—Library boards should update their materials selection/collection development policies to incorporate new technology and non-book materials. Be prepared by updating your library's policy manual before you receive a complaint.
2. **Role of Employer**—The role of the board is to support decisions made by the library staff, pursuant to board-approved collection development policies. When materials are challenged, the board should support selection decisions if these fall within board-approved policies.
3. **Role of Access Provider**—If the library board decides to remove a properly selected item from the library's collection, the library board has denied access to that item to all residents of the library's service area. The public library is a limited public forum under the First Amendment, and the library board has the responsibility to protect the library's patrons' First Amendment rights of access to library materials. In preparation for challenges, read ALA's Freedom to Read Statement and the Library Bill of Rights, as well as your library's selection policy.

—Written by Ruth Dukelow,  
*Access, March/April 1995, vol. 12, no. 5,*  
*Published by the Library of Michigan*



**MLA Intellectual Freedom Committee  
Intellectual Freedom Incident Report**

Type of material

- Book or Periodical
- Audio/visual
- Web
- Displays
- Other (please describe)

Information provided on this form is confidential.  
 ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom:  
 1-800-545-2433

Author \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Web site \_\_\_\_\_

Type of library \_\_\_\_\_

Library name \_\_\_\_\_

Challenge from \_\_\_\_\_

- Individual
- Group

Basis of challenge \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Action taken to date \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe extent of local support for the library: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe assistance that would be helpful \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Contact person \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

May the Michigan Library Association forward this form to the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom?

- Yes
- No

**Return to:  
 Michigan Library Association  
 1407 Rensen St., #2  
 Lansing, MI 48910  
 (517) 394-2774, ext. 25**

## **Resources That Can Help**

### ***MLA Intellectual Freedom Committee***

The Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Michigan Library Association consists of members representing a broad spectrum of libraries throughout the state. It has the primary responsibility of supporting the concepts of the ALA Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read Statement. As such, this committee not only represents libraries, but all residents of the state in maintaining their rights to intellectual freedom.

The charge to this committee is:

1. To serve as a clearing house of information regarding intellectual freedom in Michigan libraries. Information compiled is placed on file in the MLA office.
2. To monitor legislative developments at all levels of government and work with the MLA Public Policy Committee.
3. To develop intellectual freedom aids and educational programs for librarians, library trustees and for the general public on understanding and supporting intellectual freedom.
4. To cooperate with other intellectual freedom groups and organizations within the state.
5. To maintain an updated Intellectual Freedom Handbook.
6. To provide telephone and/or written assistance to librarians, library trustees and the general public on problems affecting intellectual freedom in the State. When a request for action is received, it will be handled directly by the MLA Executive Board with consultation from the chairperson of the MLA Intellectual Freedom Committee.

**Intellectual Freedom Committee  
Michigan Library Association  
1407 Rensen St., #2  
Phone: 517-394-2774, FAX: 517-394-2675**

### ***The American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom***

The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom exists to provide information and assistance on intellectual freedom matters. Censorship activity may be reported to the office by phone or in writing to:

Office for Intellectual Freedom  
American Library Association  
50 East Huron St.  
Chicago, IL 60611  
1-800-545-2433 ext. 4223

***Publications available:***

MEMORANDUM (ISSN 0734-3086), monthly publication of the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom.  
Subscriptions available from:

ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom  
50 East Huron St.  
Chicago, IL 60611  
1-800-545-2433, ext. 4223 or  
312-944-6780

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM MANUAL, *6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2001*, published by the ALA. Includes practical suggestions for dealing with intellectual freedom and the Library Bill of Rights and interpretations.

*Censorship and selection: issues and answers for schools* by Henry Reichman : American Library Association, Chicago, c1998

The following web pages located on the American Library Association web site also provide useful information:

“Workbook for selection policy writing”

[http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/workbook\\_selection.html](http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/workbook_selection.html)

“Dealing with concerns about library resources”

<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/dealingwithconcerns.html>

“Guidelines for coping with law enforcement inquiries”

<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/guidelineslibrary.html>