

New Brunswick Free Public Library

Collection Development Policy

Approved March 24, 1993

A. Purpose.

A written collection development policy permits the Library Board to create guidelines so the staff can build a collection of materials that meets accepted standards of quality and is relevant to community needs. Such a policy aids staff in selecting, acquiring, and maintaining a useful, well-rounded collection of books and other materials to meet the needs of the community. A policy statement helps answer questions by the public regarding the presence or absence of certain materials in the collection and helps explain the basis on which materials have been selected.

B. General Principles.

This collection development policy is an affirmation and extension of the Library Bill of Rights, the Freedom to Read, and the Freedom to View Statements of the American Library Association and the attached interpretations¹.

The goals of the selection process are to maintain a well-balanced and broad collection of materials appropriate for current and future use by the members of the New Brunswick community. The collection should stimulate the mind as well as inform and entertain.

The Library collection attempts to offer the community a wide variety of subject matter by carefully selected authorities stating a variety of points of view. We seek a general collection attaining a level of coverage in all areas of knowledge. This collection is easily supplemented with materials from the well-developed inter-library loan system and from direct access to other libraries.

Some material collected may be offensive to individuals or groups because of perceived profanity, social, economic and political ideas, religious viewpoints, the background of the author, the kinds of information provided, or other reasons. Acquisition or use of any item does not imply endorsement of the contents by the Library.

The Library is of the position that the risks of not providing access to information and ideas is greater than the risk of providing it. It is essential to provide such materials if the American ideal of freedom is to be retained. While anyone is personally free to reject materials of which they do not approve, this cannot restrict the freedom of others to read or inquire. The Library reaffirms its concern for intellectual freedom and for the reader's rights of privacy.

Selection of which materials specific children should read and view is the responsibility of the adults who best know them, their parents and guardians.

¹ Including the People's Rights to Libraries, Diversity in Collection Development, Expurgation of Library Materials, Free Access to Libraries for Minors, Access for Children and Young People to Videotapes and Other Non-print Formats, Restricted Access to Library Materials, and the Statement on Labeling. See Appendix on Page 3.

C. Clientele and Situation.

The New Brunswick Free Public Library serves a diverse community of over 48,000 residents plus many others who work in the community. New Brunswick has industrial and commercial development, especially Johnson and Johnson's International Headquarters, and major campuses of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. New Brunswick has two major medical centers, Robert Wood Johnson and St. Peters Hospital, and is the county seat for Middlesex County. This is an eclectic and ethnically diverse community with Hispanics comprising 39% of the community, White Non-Hispanics comprising 33%, and Black Non-Hispanics compromise 21%. Seven percent of the population identified themselves as non-Hispanic of two or more races.² Over 20% of the population is under the age of 18. Within each of those broad categories are individuals with different needs, backgrounds, and ambitions.

The Library is a member of the Libraries of Middlesex and cooperatively loans and borrows books from other member libraries. The Library is a member of MURAL, a cooperative direct access arrangement, and has other arrangements to permit New Brunswick residents to use all the adjacent public libraries. Rutgers University Libraries allows on-site use of its materials.

D. User Needs Supported.

Materials are collected for the following purposes:

1. To support continuous self education;
2. To afford recreation and to promote the constructive use of leisure time;
3. To meet information needs through reference services and a non-fiction collection;
4. To support formal education from grade school through college;
5. To support educational, civic, business and cultural activities;
6. to support the learning and improvement of job related skills.

E. General Priorities.

1. Language: Most of the Library's users want materials in English, but there are collections of materials in other languages, especially Spanish and Hungarian to serve the needs of users who prefer those languages.
2. Geography: The geographical priority is that materials relating to the New Brunswick, Middlesex County, and New Jersey (in that order) will be emphasized.
3. Time: The chronological priority is that materials relating to contemporary interests will be emphasized.
4. Controversial Material: In general the Library will exclude no materials except those that are clearly and solely propagandistic or of pornographic nature.

² 1990 U. S. Census.

5. Duplication: The Library purchases additional copies of titles in heavy demand. The cost of the book, subject matter and the multiplicity of reserves are factors in duplication.

F. Responsibility.

Final authority for the determination of the policies in this document is vested by statute in the Library's Board of Trustees. The responsibility for the collection and maintenance of the library collection is delegated to the Director operating within the framework of policies and objectives determined by the Library Board. The Director has, in turn, delegated this authority to other members of this staff who are cooperating in the collection development process.

Librarians are fitted to this task through training and experience; however, they must work within limitations of space and budget, and although they try to inform themselves as well as possible, they must work within limitations of knowledge. Selection and withdrawal processes are therefore cooperative and advice and suggestions from members of the community, trustees, or authorities in various fields is welcomed. Librarians, however, have the responsibility for judging the needs of their collections and their communities, and they must make the final choices.

G. Detailed Analysis.

1. Books.

The Library recognizes its obligation serving the needs of a large group of people with varied backgrounds, reading tastes, interests, and purposes. Considerations for general book selection are:

1. Needs of the community.
2. Quality of writing.
3. Contemporary significance or permanent value.
4. Importance of the subject matter.
5. Apparent ability and authority of the author.
6. Soundness of the author's attitude and approach.
7. Readability.
8. Popular approach.
9. Popularity of the materials.
10. Scarcity of information in the subject area.
11. Relation of the work to the existing collection.
12. Availability of the material elsewhere.
13. Price and availability of the materials.

2. Periodicals.

The Library tries to provide the most representative periodicals in a wide range of subjects of reference value and recreational interests. Particular emphasis is given to titles included in periodical indexes. Specialized titles are considered in relation to subject needs and their availability in area and regional libraries as found through union lists of serials. Many periodical titles are retained on microfilm.

a) Newspapers.

The Library maintains current and backfiles of New Brunswick newspapers beginning with 1811. These newspapers are on microfilm as are issues of the New York Times. Current issues and short runs of local and statewide newspapers, as well as national newspapers, are available. These newspapers have been selected based on journalistic standards, geographic representation, and demand.

3. Textbooks.

Providing textbooks and curriculum material is held to be the responsibility of the schools. Textbooks will be purchased when they are the best or only source of information on the subject.

4. Young Adult Material.

The Young Adult Collection seeks to provide a wide range of materials to stimulate the interest of teenagers in reading and in the world around them. Material is selected to meet informational, developmental, and recreational needs and to be aesthetically appealing. Materials can include hardbacks, paperbacks, pamphlets, records, periodicals, videocassettes, audiocassettes, software, and games.

Young Adult material is selected for patrons in junior and senior high school on the same criteria as adult materials and especially based on:

1. Does it say something to young people?
2. Is it worth saying?
3. How well is it said?
4. Does it appeal to young people?

The Young Adult Collection is separately identified to provide a transition between the Juvenile and Adult Collections in terms of reading interest and abilities. Reference works are not in the Young Adult collection. School assignment material is not purchased specifically for this collection. The Young Adult has access to the Juvenile, Adult, and Reference collections and is helped in the use of these materials.

5. Children's Material.

The Children's Collection is made up of materials designed to serve the needs of all children from infancy through the sixth grade, as well as adults concerned with this age group. A variety of material is considered for the collection including books and periodicals, recordings, filmstrips, art prints, videocassettes, toys, software, and games.

In recommending books for children's collections, careful consideration is given to each new title and every new edition of a recommended title is treated as new. Literary quality, good design and format, and illustration are important criteria in this evaluation as are accuracy, relevance, and appropriateness for the intended audience. Books should exhibit non-stereotypic attitudes although new editions of classics and some titles which reflect the beliefs of other times or other cultures may be acceptable. Non-fiction books are considered in relation to all the other books available on the same subject; special consideration is given to those books which deal with topics about which very little else is available and books on local history.

Recordings, both spoken and musical, are available. The quality of the production and the performance, and the relevance to children, are very important.

The Children's Area has a circulating collection and a non-circulating Reference Collection of materials. The circulating collection includes well written works of popular fiction in both hard-cover and paperback editions, factual material on a variety of subjects covering the essential interests and needs of children, ethnic and foreign children's activities or work with children, records, cassettes, posters, and art prints.

6. Local History and Genealogy Materials.

a) Printed Materials.

Books by local authors, about the area, or about local people are collected. Other local materials collected are maps, diaries, and account books of local physicians and industries, genealogies, local association and society programs, letters, scrapbooks, tapes, documents, and manuscripts are collected and organized as a local resource for the serious researcher in local history.

b) Artifacts.

Although the Library deals primarily with recorded images, the historic and research value of artifacts is recognized. The Library will maintain and preserve the artifacts within its collection. When appropriate organizations can provide appropriate public long-term local access to materials, transfer of materials will be considered. Acquisition of additional artifacts will be undertaken only when no other appropriate facility can provide appropriate public long-term local access to the materials.

c) Photographs.

Photographs of every type including glass plates, tintype, black and white, colored, and slides are sought. Reproducible negatives are created as demand warrants.

d) Genealogy.

The Library seeks to help persons doing genealogical research whenever possible. Within the New Brunswick Collection, consideration is given to this activity.

7. State Documents.

The Library maintains current and backfiles of many State Documents. The Library is a partial depository for State Documents and has an obligation to store and provide state documents on a limited basis.

8. Visual and Audio Materials.

a) Theatrical Videos.

The library maintains a growing collection of theatrical videos. This collection is intended for popular entertainment. Both currently popular movies and classics are purchased with an emphasis on materials that provide family entertainment or relate to the ethnic diversity of the community.

b) Non-Theatrical Videos.

A collection of non-theatrical videos is maintained. These videos are selected on the same basis as non-fiction books with added emphasis on the effectiveness of the visual presentation.

c) Framed Art Reproductions.

A basic collection of framed art reproductions is maintained by the Library. The purpose of the collection is to provide decorative art for those wishing to borrow pictures suitable to display on their walls. Popular art is emphasized. No attempt is made to build a collection of examples for the serious student of art. Budget constraints limit the number of new acquisitions.

d) Films.

A film collection is available for use; however, there are few additions to the collection due to the decreasing demand for films and budget constraints.

e) Audio Materials.

The Library maintains a collection of cassettes and phonograph recordings designed to give broad coverage to all types of recorded sound. Consideration is given to the popularity of the materials. Budget constraints limit the number of new acquisitions.

9. Handicapped Materials.

The Library maintains a collection of large print books for the visually impaired. General collection criteria apply to the section of large print books.

10. Software.

The Library may establish in the future a circulating collection of computer software.

H. Gifts.

The Library gratefully accepts gifts of books, but reserves the right to evaluate and dispose of such gifts following the criteria applied to materials that are purchased. The Library will not appraise a collection to be donated to the Library.

I. Deaccessioning.

Just as materials are continually being added, they are also being withdrawn. The same criteria for book selection is applied for their removal. The collection of the Library is intended to be accurate, useful, and available to the public. Except items of local history and local interest, there is no intent of the Library to maintain an in-depth collection in any area. The depth of collection coverage will be governed by how well the collection can fulfill both the demands of the present users and the potential future users of the library.

J. Patron Concerns.

The public or staff may request reconsideration of materials owned by the library. Criteria for reconsideration shall be the same as for selection and retention.

1. Any application for formal reconsideration will be submitted on the following form. Such application will be submit to the department head or librarian in charge of selecting materials in that area who will respond within one week.
2. If the response is unsatisfactory to the applicant, they may request that the decision be reviewed by the Director. The Director will respond within one week.
3. If such response is still unsatisfactory to the applicant, they may request a review by the Board of Trustees. The Board will review the request by committee and submit a recommendation to the entire Board at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board.

New Brunswick Free Public Library
 60 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick NJ 08901-2597
 Request for Material Reconsideration

Title:	
Author/Artists/Producer:	
Media Type:	Book · Video · Audio Recording · Other Material · Library Program ·
Review Requested By:	
Telephone:	
Home Address, City, State:	
Applicant Represents (Specify any organization you are representing in this request):	
Have you read/viewed/heard the entire item:	Yes · No ·
What brought this title to your attention:	
Please comment on the work as a whole:	
Please comment on the specifics that concern you:	
What other items would provide additional information on this topic:	
Would you like the opportunity to discuss this matter further:	Yes · No ·

K. Appendix.

1. 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.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
4. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
5. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
6. 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.

Adopted June 18, 1948; Amended February 2, 1961, June 27, 1967, and January 23, 1980 by the ALA Council; Adopted November 1980 by NJLA Executive Board.

2. The Freedom to Read

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free men will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights:

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those which are unorthodox or unpopular with the majority.
2. Publishers, librarians and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation contained in the books they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what books should be published or circulated.
3. It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to determine the acceptability of a book on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.
4. There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.
5. It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept with any book the prejudgment of a label characterizing the book or author as subversive or dangerous.
6. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.
7. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, bookmen can demonstrate that the answer to a bad book is a good one, the answer to a bad idea is a good one.

We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

---Excerpted from a joint statement by the American Library Association and the Association of American Publishers, 1972.

3. Freedom to View

The Freedom to View, along with the freedom to speak, to hear, and to read, is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. In a free society, there is no place for censorship of any medium or expression. Therefore, we affirm these principles:

1. It is in the public interest to provide the broadest possible access to films and other audiovisual materials, because they have proven to be among the most effective means for the communication of ideas. Liberty of circulation is essential to insure the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression.
2. It is in the public interest to provide for our audiences, films and other audiovisual materials which represent a diversity of views and expression. Selection of a work does not constitute or imply agreement with or approval of the content.
3. It is our professional responsibility to resist the constraint of labeling or pre-judging a film on the basis of the moral, religious or political beliefs of the producer or film maker or on the basis of controversial content.
4. It is our professional responsibility to contest vigorously, by all lawful means, every encroachment upon the public's freedom to view.

Originally drafted by the Educational Film Library Association's Freedom to View Committee, and adopted by the EFLA Board of Directors in February 1979; Adopted by American Library Association on June 28, 1979, endorsed by the ALA Council January 10, 1990; Adopted by the Board of Directors of the Association of Educational Communications and Technology on December 1, 1979; Adopted by the Executive Board of the New Jersey Library Association on December 17, 1981.

4. People's Rights to Libraries.

The New Jersey Library Association affirms its belief in the public right to library service - as stated in the following tenets:

1. All people are entitled to free access to the information and knowledge within a library.
2. All people are entitled to obtain current, accurate information on any topic of interest.
3. All people are entitled to courteous, efficient, and prompt service.
4. All people are entitled to assistance by qualified library personnel.
5. All people are entitled to the right of privacy in the selection or use of materials.
6. All people are entitled to the full service of the library network on a local, regional, state, and national level.
7. All people are entitled to the use of a facility that is accessible, attractive, and comfortable.
8. All people are entitled to access to the policies regarding the use and services of a library.
9. All people are entitled to library service that reflects the interests and needs of the total community.

Adopted by NJLA, 1978

5. Diversity in Collection Development: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.

Throughout history, the focus of censorship has fluctuated from generation to generation. Books and other materials have not been selected or have been removed from library collections for many reasons, among which are prejudicial language and ideas, political content, economic theory, social philosophies, religious beliefs, sexual forms of expression, and other topics of a potentially controversial nature.

Some examples of censorship may include removing or not selecting materials because they are considered by some as racist or sexist; not purchasing conservative religious materials; not selecting materials about or by minorities because it is thought these groups or interests are not represented in a community; or not providing information on or materials from non-mainstream political entities.

Librarians may seek to increase user awareness of materials on various social concerns by many means, including, but not limited to, issuing bibliographies and presenting exhibits and programs.

Librarians have a professional responsibility to be inclusive, not exclusive, in collection development and in the provision of interlibrary loan. Access to all materials legally obtainable should be assured to the user, and policies should not unjustly exclude materials even if they are offensive to the librarian or the user. Collection development should reflect the philosophy inherent in Article 2 of the Library Bill of Rights: "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." A balanced collection reflects a diversity of materials, not an equality of numbers. Collection development responsibilities include selecting materials in the languages in common use in the community which the library serves. Collection development and the selection of materials should be done according to professional standards and established selection and review procedures.

There are many complex facets to any issue, and variations of context in which issues may be expressed, discussed, or interpreted. Librarians have a professional responsibility to be fair, just, and equitable and to give all library users equal protection in guarding against violation of the library patron's right to read, view, or listen to materials and resources protected by the First Amendment, no matter what the viewpoint of the author, creator, or selector. Librarians have an obligation to protect library collections from removal of materials based on personal bias or prejudice, and to select and support the access to materials on all subjects that meet, as closely as possible, the needs and interests of all persons in the community which the library serves. This includes materials that reflect political, economic, religious, social, minority, and sexual issues.

Intellectual Freedom, the essence of equitable library services, provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored. Toleration is meaningless without tolerance for what some may consider detestable. Librarians cannot justly permit their own preferences to limit their degree of tolerance in collection development, because freedom is indivisible.

NOTE: This document replaces "Racism, Sexism, and Other - ISMS in Library Materials." Adopted July 14, 1982, amended January 10, 1990, by the ALA Council; Adopted November 18, 1982 by NJLA Executive Board

6. Expurgation of Library Materials: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Expurgating library materials is a violation of the Library Bill of Rights. Expurgation as defined by this interpretation includes any deletion, excision, alteration, editing, or obliteration of any part(s) of books or other library resources by the library, its agent, or its parent institution (if any). By such expurgation, the library is in effect denying access to the complete work and the entire spectrum of ideas that the work intended to express. Such action stands in violation of Articles 1, 2, and 3 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," that "Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval," and that "Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment."

The act of expurgation has serious implications. It involves a determination that it is necessary to restrict access to the complete work. This is censorship. When a work is expurgated, under the assumption that certain portions of that work would be harmful to minors, the situation is no less serious.

Expurgation of any books or other library resources imposes a restriction, without regard to the rights and desires of all library users, by limiting access to ideas and information.

Further, expurgation without written permission from the holder of the copyright on the material may violate the copyright provisions of the United States Code.

Adopted February 2, 1973; amended July 1, 1981; amended January 10, 1990, by the ALA Council.

7. Free Access to Libraries for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.

Library procedures and practices which effectively deny minors equal access to all library resources available to other users violate the Library Bill of Rights. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users.

Article 5 of the Library Bill of Rights states that "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." The "right to use a library" includes free access to, and unrestricted use of, all the services,

materials, and facilities the library has to offer. Every restriction on access to, and use of, library resources, based solely on the chronological age, educational level, or legal emancipation of users violates Article V.

Libraries are charged with the mission of developing resources to meet the diverse information needs and interests of the communities they serve. Services, materials, and facilities which fulfill the needs and interests of library users at different stages in their personal development are a necessary part of library resources. The needs and interest of each library user, and resources appropriate to meet those needs and interests, must be determined on an individual basis. Librarians cannot predict what resources will best fulfill the needs and interests of any individual user based on a single criterion such as chronological age, level of education, or legal emancipation.

The selection and development of library resources should not be diluted because of minors having the same access to library resources as adult users.

Institutional self-censorship diminishes the credibility of the library in the community, and restricts access for all library users.

Librarians and governing bodies should not resort to age restrictions on access to library resources in an effort to avoid actual or anticipated objections from parents or anyone else. The mission, goals, and objectives of libraries do not authorize librarians or governing bodies to assume, abrogate, or overrule the rights and responsibilities of parents or legal guardians. Librarians and governing bodies should maintain that parents - and only parents - have the right and the responsibility to restrict the access of their children - and only their children - to library resources. Parents or legal guardians who do not want their children to have access to certain library services, materials or facilities, should so advise their children. Librarians and governing bodies cannot assume the role of parents or the functions of parental authority in the private relationship between parent and child. Librarians and governing bodies have a public and professional obligation to provide equal access to all library resources for all library users.

Librarians have a professional commitment to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free and equal access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, format, or amount of detail. This principal of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults. Librarians and governing bodies must uphold this principal in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors.

Adopted June 30, 1972; amended July 1, 1981; July 3, 1991, by the ALA Council.

8. Access for Children and Young People to Videotapes and Other Non-print Formats: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.

Library collections of videotapes, motion pictures, and other non-print formats raise a number of intellectual freedom issues, especially regarding minors.

The interests of young people, like those of adults, are not limited by subject, theme, or level of sophistication. Librarians have a responsibility to ensure young people have access to materials and services that reflect diversity sufficient to meet their needs.

To guide librarians and others in resolving these issues, the American Library Association provides the following guidelines.

The Library Bill of Rights says, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."

ALA's Free Access to Libraries for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights states:

The "right to use a library" includes use of, and access to, all library materials and services. Thus, practices which allow adults to use some services and materials which are denied to minors abridge use based on age.

It is the parents - and only parents -- who may restrict their children -- and only their children -- from access to library materials and services. People who would rather their children did not have access to certain materials should advise their children. The library and its staff are responsible for providing equal access to library materials and services for all library users.

Policies which set minimum age limits for access to videotapes and/or other audiovisual materials and equipment, with or without parental permission, abridge library use for minors. Further, age limits based on the cost of the materials are unacceptable. Unless directly and specifically prohibited by law from circulating certain motion pictures and video productions to minors, librarians should apply the same standards to circulation of these materials as are applied to books and other materials.

Recognizing that libraries cannot act in loco parentis, ALA acknowledges and supports the exercise by parents of their responsibility to guide their own children's reading and viewing. Published reviews of films and videotapes and/or reference works which provide information about the content, subject matter, and recommended audiences can be made available in conjunction with non-print collections to assist parents in guiding their children without implicating the library in censorship. This material may include information provided by video producers and distributors, promotional material on videotape packaging, and Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings if they are included on the tape or in the packaging by the original publisher and/or if they appear in review sources or reference works included in the library's collection. Marking out or removing ratings information from videotape packages constitutes expurgation or censorship.

MPAA and other rating services are private advisory codes and have no legal standing. For the library to add such ratings to the material if they are not already there, to post a list of such ratings with a collection, or to attempt to enforce such ratings through circulation policies or other procedures constitutes labeling, "an attempt to prejudice attitudes" about the material, and is unacceptable. The application of locally generated ratings schemes intended to provide content warnings to library users is also inconsistent with the Library Bill of Rights.

Adopted June 28, 1989, by the ALA Council.

9. Restricted Access to Library Materials: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.

Libraries are a traditional forum for the open exchange of information. Attempts to restrict access to library materials violate the basic tenets of the Library Bill of Rights.

Historically, attempts have been made to limit access by relegating materials into segregated collections. These attempts are in violation of established policy. Such collections are often referred to by a variety of names, including "closed shelf," "locked case," "adults only," "restricted shelf," or "high demand." Access to some materials also may require a monetary fee or financial deposit. In any situation which restricts access to certain materials, a barrier is placed between the patron and those materials. That barrier may be age related, linguistic, economic, or psychological in nature.

Because materials placed in restricted collections often deal with controversial, unusual, or "sensitive" subjects, having to ask a librarian or circulation clerk for them may be embarrassing or inhibiting for patrons desiring the materials. Needing to ask for materials may pose a language barrier or a staff service barrier. Because restricted collections often are composed of materials which some library patrons consider "objectionable," the potential user may be predisposed to think of the materials as "objectionable" and, therefore, are reluctant to ask for them.

Barriers between the materials and the patron which are psychological, or are affected by language skills, are nonetheless limitations on access to information. Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication (see also "Statement on Labeling").

There may be, however, countervailing factors to establish policies to protect library materials--specifically, for reasons of physical preservation including protection from theft or mutilation. Any such policies must be carefully formulated and administered with extreme attention to the principles of intellectual freedom. This caution is also in keeping with ALA policies, such as "Evaluating Library Collections," "Free Access to Libraries for Minors," and the "Preservation Policy."

Finally, in keeping with the "Joint Statement on Access" of the American Library Association and Society of American Archivists, restrictions that result from donor agreements or contracts for special collections materials must be similarly circumscribed. Permanent exclusions are not acceptable. The overriding impetus must be to work for free and unfettered access to all documentary heritage.

Adopted February 2, 1973; amended July 1, 1981; July 3, 1991, by the ALA Council.

10. Statement on Labeling: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.

Labeling is the practice of describing or designating materials by affixing a prejudicial label and/or segregating them by a prejudicial system. The American Library Association opposes these means of predisposing people's attitudes toward library materials for the following reasons:

1. Labeling is an attempt to prejudice attitudes and as such, it is a censor's tool.
2. Some find it easy and even proper, according to their ethics, to establish criteria for judging publications as objectionable. However, injustice and ignorance rather than justice and enlightenment result from such practices, and the American Library Association opposes the establishment of such criteria.
3. Libraries do not advocate the ideas found in their collections. The presence of books and other resources in a library does not indicate endorsement of their contents by the library.

A variety of private organizations promulgate rating systems and/or review materials as a means of advising either their members or the general public concerning their opinions of the contents and suitability or appropriate age for use of certain books, films, recordings, or other materials. For the library to adopt or enforce any of these private systems, to attach such ratings to library materials, to include them in bibliographic records, library catalogs, or other finding aids, or otherwise to endorse them would violate the Library Bill of Rights.

While some attempts have been made to adopt these systems into law, the constitutionality of such measures is extremely questionable. If such legislation is passed which applies within a library's jurisdiction, the library should seek competent legal advice concerning its applicability to library operations.

Publishers, industry groups, and distributors sometimes add ratings to material or include them as part of their packaging. Librarians should not endorse such practices. However, removing or obliterating such ratings -- if placed there by or with permission of the copyright holder -- could constitute expurgation, which is also unacceptable.

The American Library Association opposes efforts which aim at closing any path to knowledge. This statement, however, does not exclude the adoption of organizational schemes designed as directional aids or to facilitate access to materials.

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