# DRAFT: User-Generated Content in Library Discovery Systems: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

Libraries offer a variety of information retrieval systems to provide access to the resources in their collections. Such systems include, but are not limited to, the library catalog, institutional repositories, digital collections, and discovery services.[[1]](#footnote-0) Many of these systems have the ability to include social media components and knowledge-sharing tools that allow libraries to provide greater opportunities for engagement through user-generated content. These features may include the ability of users to contribute commentary such as reviews, use simple point-and-click rating systems (e.g., one star to five stars), or engage in extensive discussions and other social interactions. This kind of user-generated content has the potential to influence the functionality of the retrieval system (e.g., content with more stars could appear higher in search results).

The library is not obligated to open its discovery system to user-generated content. A publicly funded library can limit user-generated content to a defined class of users or limit the subject matter of user-generated content, as long as the distinctions drawn are viewpoint neutral.[[2]](#footnote-1) For example, the library could require that users contributing content to the library’s discovery system possess a valid library card or an online account with the library.

If a publicly funded library does choose to allow users to contribute content to the library’s discovery system, they should adopt policies which define the time, place, or manner in which the user contributes the content to the library’s discovery system. Any restrictions must be reasonable and cannot be based upon the beliefs or affiliations of the user or the views expressed in the user-generated content. Policies should be regularly reviewed with legal counsel, shared with staff, and made available to the public in all of the commonly used languages within the community served.

In addition, the library should safeguard the privacy of users who contribute content to the library discovery systems. Libraries should review, and encourage users to review, the user data collection policies of any third party providers involved in managing or storing the user-generated content. User consent should be obtained before any personal data is collected and shared with third party providers, and libraries should protect and safeguarding all library use data collected from library users.[[3]](#footnote-2)

The library should identify what is user-generated content and what is library-generated content within the discovery system. While both are valuable, user-generated content presents an opportunity for users to engage with the library and the community and make contributions to shared knowledge. This engagement encourages a shared conversation between citizens and demonstrates the value of libraries as institutions for information and learning.

Adopted January 12, 2016, by the ALA Council.

1. “[Library Privacy Guidelines for Library Websites, Opacs, and Discover Systems](https://chooseprivacyeveryday.org/resources/guidelines-checklists-for-libraries/library-privacy-guidelines-for-library-websites-opacs-and-discovery-services/),” Intellectual Freedom Committee, June 24, 2016. “A discovery service provides a single web-based user interface to search across multiple resources such as library catalogs, periodical databases, institutional repositories, and digital collections." [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. “[Social Media Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/socialmediaguidelines),” approved by the Intellectual Freedom Committee June 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. "[Privacy: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/privacy)," adopted June 19, 2002, by the ALA Council; amended on July 1, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)