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Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation



Sarah Johnson 9 days ago

In response to Martin's email seeking comments/suggestions on the resolution to rescind ALA's new in...

1. Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

2

[RECOMMEND](#)

[Divisions](#)[Round Tables](#)**Sarah Johnson**[ACTIONS ▾](#)

Posted 9 days ago

[REPLY TO DISCUSSION](#)

In response to Martin's email seeking comments/suggestions on the resolution to rescind ALA's new interpretation on Meeting Rooms, I would like to share my personal opinions as a member of the IFRT round table.

While I understand the emotional response to the words "hate speech" and "hate groups" and the strong opposition to a document that affirms their existence, I stand by the new Interpretation.

Just as the 1991 edition was a testament to its time, this new edition speaks volumes of the times that we are living in.

We can not forget that as librarians, we stand for Intellectual Freedom, we support the First Amendment, and we strive to share information so that we can create a well-informed society. To stay within legal standards, libraries must maintain equal access to resources, and in doing so may have to provide access to groups that are outside of our comfort zones. This is nothing new. What is new, however, is the fact that we are all more cognizant of what we believe in, and in what we can do to create the most welcoming environments imaginable for everyone.

For this reason; because our distaste for hate speech and hate groups has become so strong, I feel that we must keep the language the same to serve as a reminder of what we are obligated to uphold, whether we believe in its right to exist or not.

When we, as a society, have come to a different place, it will be right to alter the interpretation yet again.

Sarah Johnson
Cataloging Librarian/Assistant Professor
Emporia State University

[Divisions](#)[Round Tables](#)

2. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

1

[RECOMMEND](#)

Mary Woodard

[ACTIONS ▾](#)

Posted 9 days ago

[REPLY TO DISCUSSION](#)

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In light of the discussion around the Meeting Rooms interpretation, I wanted to share a recent podcast that gave me food for thought. In this episode of The Daily, the executive director of the ACLU discusses their mission to fight for the rights of everyone, even bringing litigation when a Neo-Nazi group was denied the right to meet. Take a listen: [The Daily - Why the A.C.L.U. Wants to Be More Like the N.R.A. - 27:06](#)

RadioPublic

[remove preview](#)

The Daily - Why the A.C.L.U. Wants to Be More Like the N.R.A. - 27:06



For decades, the American Civil Liberties Union has battled in the courts on behalf of Americans' constitutional rights, whether that means same-sex marriage or the right of neo-Nazis to hold a rally. But since the 2016 election, the A.C.L.U. has been changing tactics, and one of its models for the future is the National Rifle Association.

[View this on RadioPublic >](#)

Divisions
Mary Woodard

Round Tables
Director-Library Services
Mesquite ISD
Mesquite TX
ALA Chapter Councilor, 2018-2021

mwoodard@mesquiteisd.org

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

3. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

0

RECOMMEND



[Jeremy Brett](#)

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 7 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION

▼

The ACLU does sterling work, but I'd also point out the existence of the National Lawyers Guild, another activist civil and human rights organization that's been around since the 1930s and that makes it a policy NOT to defend Nazis or other hate groups that advocate violence and dehumanization.

<https://www.nlg.org/>

Jeremy Brett

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

4. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

5

RECOMMEND

LeeAnn McNabb

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 8 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

Respectfully, I don't think that anyone's concerns about the wording are because we are strongly opposed to a document that affirms their existence. We all know they exist and aren't contesting that fact. I also wholeheartedly disagree that now "we are all more cognizant of what we believe in, and in what we can do to create the most welcoming environments imaginable for everyone." I've felt this way for over twenty years so this is nothing new to me.

Simply put, I do not believe that we need to be that specific in the resolution language as to include those phrases for a variety of reasons. One, it will definitely garner attention from numerous sides of the debate publicly. Second, less specific language will allow individual library systems to decide for themselves how they wish to handle the issues of hate speech and hate groups in their libraries. Do we really need some individuals on an ALA roundtable dictating for all library system's what their responsibilities are?

A library branch whose staff is mostly people of color and who serve mostly people of color shouldn't have to deal with white supremacists wearing hateful shirts or carrying hateful signs walk through their library on the way to and from the meeting room. That automatically creates a hostile environment not only for library staff, but for the customers who they serve. I completely understand the arguments on the other side. And, this is a tough call for me to make as I agree that it is a very slippery slope. I'm still open to discussion and may be convinced to change my mind, but as a person who manages a library in a very diverse community where racial profiling and institutional racism are a part of these children's every day existence, I'd really love for their time in this library to be a place they can feel safe.

As I've said elsewhere, these are my thoughts and my thoughts alone. Anything that I
Divisions [] Round Tables [] say does not represent the library system with whom I'm employed and I will follow the
lead of my library system in however it envisions the use of its meeting spaces.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

LeeAnn McNabb
Branch Manager
Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

5. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

5

RECOMMEND



David Moles

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 7 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

What Ms. McNabb said. Individual libraries and librarians on the ground are better positioned than an ALA committee to balance the library's obligations to outside groups wanting to make use of library premises against its obligations to other patrons and to staff.

Intellectual freedom is a critical part of the library mission but it's not the entirety of it. If we consider hate speech only and entirely as a question of intellectual freedom, then *of course* we are going to weight the scales toward free speech maximalism. Of course we are going want to think of ourselves as open-minded and even-handed. Of course we're going to worry about slippery slopes to censorship. Of course we - especially those of us lucky enough to be white, straight, affluent, Christian (or

Divisions

passably agnostic) enough to have little to fear from hate groups - are going to go to the ~~Round Tables~~ ~~the barricades~~ to go the full Hall-on-Voltaire: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

And someone in ALA probably *should* be an advocate for the maximalist point of view. Intellectual freedom is the mandate of the OIF and the IFC. It's arguably appropriate for them to take on that role.

But intellectual freedom is only one of ALA's core values. We also claim (among other values) access, confidentiality, democracy, diversity, social responsibility, and the public good.

If balancing those values was easy we wouldn't be arguing about it. But as long as we think of hate speech solely as an intellectual freedom issue, we aren't even trying.

David Moles
Senior Software Developer
California Digital Library

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

6. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

3

RECOMMEND



Roger Sutton

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 7 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

Divisions

This my first time posting to ALA Connect, so please forgive me if I've posted in the Round Tables ~~wrong place~~ or something. My main problem with the new Interpretation is the way it labels speech. You can't use the terms "hate groups" or "hate speech" as if they are neutral descriptors, so the term sits oddly in the list "religious, social, civic, partisan political, or hate groups." If the point is that the library cannot discriminate on the basis of viewpoint, wouldn't it be better to emphasize *that* point rather than making judgments about the groups seeking meeting room access?

I wrote a bit about this on the Horn Book blog if anyone is interested: <https://www.hbook.com/2018/07/blogs/read-roger/one-things-not-like-others/>

Roger Sutton
Editor in Chief
Horn Book Inc.

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

7. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

1

RECOMMEND



Karen Schneider

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 6 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION

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Roger, you may have pinpointed what has been bothering me about the "hate group" language. It doesn't align well with the other "may not discriminate" examples. There is a difference between saying a library does not limit speech versus a library provides access to hate groups.

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Round Tables

Pam, I understand what you're saying, but noting that this is not a legal ruling but voluntary guidance doesn't work for me in this case, because interpretations of the LBOR message very clearly who we are as a member association. The Intellectual Freedom Manual is published by ALA's own publishing house, and this is how it is marketed: "The new [9th] edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* is more than just an invaluable compendium of guiding principles and policies. It's also an indispensable resource for day-to-day guidance on maintaining free and equal access to information for all people." I do not agree that a guiding principle of ALA is that we provide meeting rooms to hate groups. There are ALA members who believe very strongly in providing access to anyone regardless of their beliefs, but that's a very different thing to say.

I keep thinking this may be primarily a language-framing issue. If the IFM is intended to be an "indispensable resource," perhaps better guidance would be about the importance of crafting meeting room policy that reflects governing boards' positions on access to meeting rooms as well as ALA's commitment to free speech, and acknowledge that there are steeply-contested areas to be aware of. If you say a meeting room is open to everyone, then it's open to everyone. Otherwise, be sure your policy stipulates your limitations. That may not be palatable to the free-speech hardliners, but it's advice that acknowledges that there are structural inequalities embedded in the concept of neutrality.

Karen Schneider
Dean, University Library
Sonoma State University

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

8. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

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RECOMMEND

[Divisions](#)[Round Tables](#)Pamela Klipsch

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 5 days ago

[REPLY TO DISCUSSION](#) ▾

<https://reason.com/blog/2018/07/12/yes-hate-groups-can-hold-meetings-in-lib>
Yes, 'Hate Groups' Can Hold Meetings in Libraries, Too [Reason.com]

Pam Klipsch MLS

Director

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[» ORIGINAL MESSAGE](#)

9. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

1

[RECOMMEND](#)Karen Schneider

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 5 days ago

[REPLY TO DISCUSSION](#) ▾

Divisions

Rou Re Pam's citation from Reason Magazine: I would expect Reason to take that position, but it's not generally compelling. All it does is spell out what a hardline libertarian position on hate speech looks like. Given Reason Foundation's funding sources, I would not cite its magazine to justify ALA's positions.

Karen Schneider
Dean, University Library
Sonoma State University

» ORIGINAL MESSAGE

10. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

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RECOMMEND



Pamela Klipsch

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 3 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

<http://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/632611360/the-right-to-speak>

Pamela Klipsch
Director
Jefferson County Library
High RidgeMO

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11. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

1

[RECOMMEND](#)

[Mike Paxton](#)

[ACTIONS ▾](#)

Posted 7 days ago

[REPLY TO DISCUSSION](#)

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Posting to agree with LeeAnn McNabb and David Moles, and to add - often the slippery slope argument turns into "well, what *is* a hate group/hate speech? Is BLM a hate group? Is a political organization working to amend immigration law a hate group?" (Citing these as examples of the slippery slope, not to get into the discussion of what is and isn't here)

When the issues get nuanced and require judgement based on the specific actions, words, and groups involved, ALA should seek to empower local librarians to make decisions based on *all* of ALA core values rather than saying "intellectual freedom overrides diversity and the public good, so you have to give hate groups a platform."

Mike Paxton
Document Delivery Services Librarian
Regenstein Library - University of Chicago
(not speaking for my employer)

[▶ ORIGINAL MESSAGE](#)

12. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

2

RECOMMEND



Anna Burwell

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 6 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

Posting to third (or fourth...or otherwise make note of) David, LeeAnn, and etc.'s posts about the problematic aspects of specifically adding "hate groups" and "hate speech" to the amendment. By putting that specific wording in there, individual libraries are robbed of their ability to adjust and adapt--and it puts some of us in very awful situations.

I'm not particularly ashamed to admit that I've been one of the librarians agitating in the blogosphere, but I have very personal reason to: I cross over into multiple groups often targeted by hate groups--particularly the ones we see coming to power right now. I would very much like to *not* feel terrified of coming to work just because of who may or may not be using our meeting rooms.

Furthermore, and I advise some of you to do this yourselves, but our director has contacted the County Prosecutor's office for some legal insight into this matter. His advice basically boils down to this: We can't police free speech--this has never been the goal--but we do have, within reason, the power to decide who does and doesn't get to use our building for their own purposes. After all, we do physically have to 'police' the building and keep the peace.

Anna Burwell
Adult Services Specialist
Swanton LSD Library

Divisions

Round Tables

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

13. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

1

RECOMMEND



Sarah Johnson

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 7 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION

▼

Everyone,

I just wanted to say thank you for sharing your views. This is a great discussion and I'm happy that we can discuss the topic here. You've all given me a lot of food for thought!

Sarah Johnson
Cataloging Librarian/Assistant Professor
Emporia State University

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Divisions

14. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

Round Tables

1

RECOMMEND



Doug Archer

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 7 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION

▼

LeeAnn,

While I don't necessarily agree with the rest of your analysis, you're probably right that less specific language may be better. Rather than listing types of groups and their purposes (the list of legitimate groups is endless), it might be better to simply say something like "all constitutionally protected speech" and put a period after that! All means ALL while leaving associated behavior open to regulation.

Best wishes,

Doug

J. Douglas Archer

Peace Studies, Global Affairs and Political Science Librarian

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► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

[Divisions](#)[Round Tables](#)

15. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

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[RECOMMEND](#)

[LeeAnn McNabb](#)

[ACTIONS ▾](#)

Posted 2 days ago

[REPLY TO DISCUSSION](#)

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Doug and others participating in this discussion,

Thank you for everyone's comments! I've been having an interesting discussion on my Facebook news feed on this topic. I really can see both sides of this debate and am having trouble myself determining what wording I think is best.

As a clarification, I think we should strive to serve everyone equally, no matter their viewpoints. My issue is the inclusion of those specific phrases, which may call the attention of those groups, as well my concern that my own white privilege may be blinding me to valid considerations on this issue of others around me, and that individual library system's would benefit from a more general wording which they can then work with their own legal representation to find a balance that works for the system, their customers, and their employees. As an anti-racist, the thought that they'd be using my library meeting room to plan activities that could harm (not all harm is physical) the many beautiful children in this community makes my stomach turn. I really do aspire for my library branch to be a place where PoC, LGBTQ+, women, and people of varying abilities feel safe and welcome. Having said that, I believe there is a difference between something I find objectionable and creating a rule against that thing. And, I realize there are legal ramifications for those libraries that may interpret the guidelines differently than others. However, I think it's up to those systems to make that decision rather than this committee.

I hope we can continue productive discussions on this topic.

Divisions

Again, I speak only for myself here and do not represent the feelings, guidelines, or policies of the library system for whom I work.

Sincerely,

LeeAnn

LeeAnn McNabb
Branch Manager
Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

» ORIGINAL MESSAGE

16. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

1

RECOMMEND



Carl Parham

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 6 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

We are being too specific in trying to enumerate types of speech. To respect all views, even those repugnant to us, we need to allow all lawful speech. That has been defined legally in *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 395 U.S. 444 (1969).

Brandenburg test

"The test determined that the government may prohibit speech advocating the use of force or crime if the speech satisfies both elements of the two-part test:

1. The speech is "directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action," AND
2. The speech is "likely to incite or produce such action."

Divisions -- Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute.
Round Tables
https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/brandenburg_test

Carl Parham
Cataloging Librarian
South College of Tennessee

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

17. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

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RECOMMEND



Pamela Klipsch

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 6 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

I would suggest that part of the confusion and the controversy over the Meeting Room Interpretation comes from a general misunderstanding of the purpose and function of the Library Bill of Rights and its Interpretations.

The ALA is a voluntary organization, and no library or library employee --- whether a member or ALA or not a member of ALA --- is legally bound to comply with these or any other policy recommendations adopted by ALA Council.

What these are, are recommended best practices, developed by --- in this instance --- the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee and offered as guidance to libraries and library employees as they work with their own governing boards to craft their own local policies. The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee is made up of a diverse cross section of all types of librarians and all types of libraries, applying their real life experience to

help colleagues navigate difficult situations, balance conflicting values and achieve a
Divisions. Round Tables viable solution.

Implicit in this charge is the obligation to make libraries aware of the potential repercussions of the policy choices they make. When it comes to libraries and the First Amendment, there is a history of case law, set out in the decisions of the courts, which make clear that publicly funded libraries are held to the most stringent standard when it comes to the rights of free speech and access to the resources of the library, including access to meeting spaces.

The Library Bill of Rights and its Interpretations are best practices that libraries and librarians can choose to implement or not. But we are all bound by the First Amendment as it has been interpreted by the courts. Your library may decide to challenge the law; that is your governing board's decision to make. But at the very least you and your board should be cognizant of the potential consequences of such a decision before, not after the fact.

Pamela Klipsch
Director
Jefferson County Library
High Ridge MO

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

18. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

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RECOMMEND



David Moles

ACTIONS ▾

Divisions

Posted 5 days ago
Round Tables

REPLY TO DISCUSSION



“ I would suggest that part of the confusion and the controversy over the Meeting Room Interpretation comes from a general misunderstanding of the purpose and function of the Library Bill of Rights and its Interpretations.

The ALA is a voluntary organization, and no library or library employee --- whether a member or ALA or not a member of ALA --- is legally bound to comply with these or any other policy recommendations adopted by ALA Council.”

With respect, I don't believe any of those objecting to the MRI are under the misapprehension that the ALA is a legislative body or that any librarian is legally obliged to follow ALA council policy. Certainly no one in this thread.

Nor does anyone believe the ALA should be providing libraries with misleading legal advice or advice likely to lead libraries into legal liability. That said, neither the MRI's hate clauses nor the process by which they were adopted suggest that they were the product of considered legal advice. Such advice would undoubtedly at least acknowledge that there exist distinctions in law between speech that is merely hostile or deeply offensive and speech that is defamatory or speech that is likely to lead to an imminent breach of the peace. It would acknowledge that even where the law might require that libraries give access to speakers and groups that pose a risk of disruption or a risk to staff or patron safety there are measures libraries can take to minimize those risks. (And if the IFC is obliged "to make libraries aware of the potential repercussions of the policy choices they make," surely it is obliged to consider *all* potential repercussions, not only the potential for a First Amendment lawsuit? Calling for libraries to embrace hate groups but failing to provide guidance on how, within the law, to protect patrons and staff from those groups is, frankly, irresponsible.)

Nor would mere legal advice entail a blanket philosophical statement that, United States case law aside, the ALA as a body considers hate speech to be free speech deserving of protection. Clearly many librarians do. Clearly many librarians do not. The obligation to help libraries protect themselves from legal exposure does not require the ALA to take a stand in that debate.

Divisions

David Moles
Round Tables
Senior Software Developer
California Digital Library
(speaking only for myself)

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE

19. RE: Re: Meeting Rooms Interpretation

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RECOMMEND



Eileen Palmer

ACTIONS ▾

Posted 6 days ago

REPLY TO DISCUSSION ▾

Based on the discussion I have seen it seems likely that Council will rescind approval of the current Meeting Room Interpretation document. While I do not share the point of view that inclusion of the terms hate group or hate speech equal endorsement, I have come to agree with the point of view that their inclusion does nothing to advance the purpose of the document and hope that the terms are eliminated. I also hope this is done without any additional changes to the document.

What I believe this discussion has highlighted, and what I believe ALA must find a way to discuss directly, is that many of us no longer believe (or have never believed) in some elements of the Library Bill of Rights. We have put bandaids over this issue in the past (the Kramer case and Internet pornography/filtering in the library are two examples) but that is no longer working. Local library boards may claim to follow the Library Bill of Rights but not all library policies deliver on that claim. And how can they when we ourselves cannot agree?

Today many library staff are actively questioning some tenets of the LBOR and whether those tenets are in conflict with values of diversity, inclusion and social justice. This is a

topic that inspires fierce and passionate responses on both side but there has been no Divisions Round Tables acceptable forum for discussion of the real underlying issue.

It's become popular to have debates that discuss whether or not libraries are neutral but even those conversations generally avoid direct discussion of whether or not the debaters believe in the LBOR. That, in my opinion, is the conversation we should be having. Until we do no interpretation document will have the usefulness the profession requires of it. Because the problem is not really with the interpretation is it?

Eileen M. Palmer
Executive Director
Libraries of Middlesex Automation Consortium

► ORIGINAL MESSAGE



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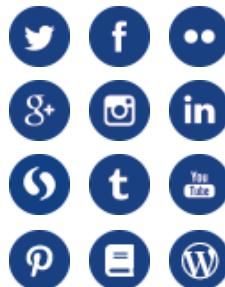
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