DRAFT: Services to People with Disabilities: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

The American Library Association recognizes that people with disabilities are a large and vibrant part of society. Libraries should be fully inclusive of all members of their community and strive to break down barriers to access. The library can play a transformational role in helping facilitate more complete participation in society by providing fully accessible resources and services.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with a disability as “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”1 As such, there is no all-encompassing list of disabilities. The category of a “person with a disability’” includes a broad range of individuals with a diversity of abilities, identities, and appearances. This intersectional group shares a common experience of discrimination and encountering barriers to access.

Libraries are committed to providing equal access to collections, services, and facilities for all library users. When this is not possible, reasonable accommodations and timely remediation must be employed to provide an equivalent experience to people with disabilities. Libraries should make every reasonable effort to follow the standards and requirements of ADA and state or local disability accessibility guidelines. Library staff should never presuppose a person’s limits based on a disability, as it may inadvertently limit the scope of services, thereby censoring information access. The *Library Bill of Rights* articles are explicated below to focus on services to people with disabilities.

**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.**

Libraries should contain a diverse collection that highlights the perspectives of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities. Historically, these groups have not been treated equitably and it is the responsibility of the library to act in a legal, ethical, and inclusive manner to meet the information needs of all patrons.

In addition to including diverse perspectives in the library collection, the collection itself should be accessible to all users. All library resources, including its website and online resources, should be available in formats accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

Library administrators should educate themselves about technical and legal standards for digital accessibility, and manage staffing and resources to provide equal access. Library administrators should support librarians and technical staff to meet these standards through a combination of professional development, planning for time needed to develop accessible library websites and other content, and outsourcing as needed.

Library administrators should also ensure that their institutions work closely with vendors to address accessibility concerns and that vendors provide reasonable timelines to remediate accessibility problems before the library agrees to license, subscribe to, or purchase a digital resource or product.

Access to materials should not be restricted by any presuppositions about information needs, interests, or capacity for understanding. Library staff should actively research and integrate existing and emerging accessible technologies and provide services to assist patrons when conflicts exist. The availability of these technologies and services should be marketed and available to all patrons. When libraries present information in formats that are accessible to all users, and do not limit access to physical facilities or virtual library structures, they eliminate barriers to information.

**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.**

Within their fiscal and physical limits, libraries should seek to add diverse voices on all topics to the collection, including the words and depictions of people with disabilities. People with disabilities are to be reflected in the collection not as a single group but as an intersectional part of the community, across every age, race, gender, class, and orientation. In order to be inclusive, libraries must provide accurate, up-to-date, and representative materials in their collections to meet the information needs of their users. The collection should also preserve historic materials that reflect an accurate depiction of the progress toward inclusion and equality that has occurred within American society.

**III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.**

Too often, acts of censorship silence the voices of those already marginalized. Libraries provide opportunities for all voices to be heard, including those perspectives that are voiced less often or less loudly. Library staff should not allow their personal and professional biases to dictate or inform services or resources. As stated in “Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*,” “Libraries should counter censorship with inclusion.”2

**IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.**

As part of a commitment to free access, library staff should proactively reach out to individuals with disabilities, as well as advocacy and support organizations, to create formal or informal partnerships with them. This same model of partnership and communication should be used when planning programming, adding to the collection, and making physical modifications to library spaces. Library staff should include as many diverse segments of the community it serves as possible in every step of planning and implementation processes.

**V. A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.**

A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of a disability, whether actual or perceived. Library staff should consider whether policies and procedures are inclusive of people of all abilities.

Physical access to the library should also not be a barrier to library use. Buildings should be accessible and when this is not possible, reasonable accommodations should be offered.

Libraries should provide training opportunities for all staff and volunteers. Training should include effective techniques for providing services for users with disabilities, as well for working with colleagues with disabilities. Libraries should adopt policies to ensure that people with disabilities have an opportunity to serve as members of the library staff, administrative units, and governing boards.

To be truly accessible to all, libraries should provide accommodations such as sign language interpreters, open captions during presentations, and visual description during programming when requested by users or attendees.

**VI. 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.**

If a library provides exhibit spaces and meeting rooms to its patrons, those spaces should be as physically accessible as all public areas are required to be. Examples of reasonable structural modifications include automatic doors, handrails, elevators, ramps, and clear travel paths. The library should also provide accessible tables, desks, restrooms, and parking. Information on the physical facility must be included on the library’s website in an accessible format.

The *Library Bill of Rights* states, “All libraries are forums for information and ideas.”3 By removing the physical, technological, behavioral, and procedural barriers to accessing those forums, libraries promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities into society.

1. “[A Guide to Disability Rights Laws](https://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm),” U.S. Department of Justice, July 2009.
2. “[Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/EDI),” adopted June 27, 2017, by the ALA Council.
3. [*Library Bill of Rights*](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill), adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; inclusion of “age” reaffirmed January 23, 1996.

Adopted January 28, 2009, by the ALA Council with the title “Services to Persons with Disabilities.” Revisions drafted in 2018.

**See also**

* “[Library Services for People with Disabilities](http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/policymanual/updatedpolicymanual/ocrpdfofprm/54-3-2libraryservi.pdf)” (2001)