

DRAFT: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to the promotion and practice of intellectual freedom. Libraries are essential to democracy and self-government, to personal development and social progress, and to every individual's inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. To that end, libraries and library workers should embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion in everything that they do.

"Equity" takes difference into account to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair outcome. Equity recognizes that some groups were (and are) disadvantaged in accessing educational and employment opportunities and are, therefore, underrepresented or marginalized in many organizations and institutions. Equity, therefore, means increasing diversity by ameliorating conditions of disadvantaged groups.

"Diversity" can be defined as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. When we recognize, value, and embrace diversity, we are recognizing, valuing, and embracing the uniqueness of each individual.

"Inclusion" means an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully; are valued for their distinctive skills, experiences, and perspectives; have equal access to resources and opportunities; and can contribute fully to the organization's success.

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.

Library collections, regardless of material format, should include a full range of viewpoints and experiences, serving the needs of all members of the community. Within the constraints of space and resources, all libraries should seek out materials produced by diverse authors or creators. Diverse authors and viewpoints are not equitably represented in the output of many mainstream publishers and other producers, so it may require extra effort to locate, review, and acquire these materials. Libraries should seek out small press, independent, and self-published content and may benefit from cooperative arrangements and other partnerships to share in the work of locating and acquiring diverse materials. Interlibrary loan may complement but not substitute for the development of diverse, local collections.

To provide truly equitable and inclusive service, libraries must work closely with diverse communities to understand their needs and aspirations, so that the library can respond appropriately with collections, programs, and services to meet those needs. The community will feel truly welcome and included when community members see themselves reflected in a library staff that shares their ethnic or racial

backgrounds, speaks their languages, shares their gender identities, or otherwise reflects their personal experience.

Libraries should review their access policies with the goal of advancing equity of access to the library's collections and services. Identification requirements, overdue charges and fees, or deposits for service are examples of traditional approaches that often exclude some members of the community from services based on their housing status, economic status, education level, age, or gender identity. Libraries should seek to remove these barriers from their access policies.

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.

Beyond merely avoiding the exclusion of materials representing unorthodox or unpopular ideas, libraries should proactively seek to include an abundance of resources and programming representing the greatest possible diversity of genres, ideas, and expression. A full commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion requires that library collections and programming reflect the broad range of viewpoints and cultures that exist in our world. Socially excluded and marginalized people, not just the mainstream majority, should be able to see themselves reflected in the resources and programs that libraries offer.

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

By challenging censorship, libraries foster an inclusive environment where all voices have the opportunity to be heard. By exposing all facets of contested issues, libraries encourage enlightenment and empower individuals to make decisions and form beliefs after weighing all arguments. Inclusive materials, programs, and services may not be universally popular, but it is the library's responsibility to provide access to all points of view, not just prevailing opinions. Dissent should be respected but should not dictate library policy. Libraries should prepare themselves to deal with challenges by adopting appropriate policies and procedures.¹

Libraries have an obligation not only to respond to external challenges, but to also discourage internal self-censorship, which may have a disproportionate effect on diverse voices in collections, programming, and all aspects of library services. Libraries should seek to counter censorship by actively pursuing inclusion.

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

American society encompasses persons of diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. The constitutional principles of free expression and free access to ideas have always affirmed and celebrated this diversity. Any attempt to limit free expression or restrict access to ideas within libraries threatens the core values of equity, inclusion, and diversity for everyone.

Libraries should not merely be neutral places for people to share information, but should proactively welcome socially excluded and marginalized people to fully participate in community debates and discussions. Libraries should establish and maintain strong ties to organizations that advocate for the rights of marginalized people. Finally, libraries should take action in solidarity with all those resisting attempts to abridge the rights of any socially excluded and marginalized people.

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

In the Library Bill of Rights and all of its Interpretations and supporting documents, the principle of inclusion is clear and unambiguous.

"Origin" encompasses all of the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in the circumstances of their birth.

"Age" encompasses all of the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in their levels of development and maturity.

"Background" encompasses all of the characteristics of individuals that are a result of their life experiences.

"Views" encompass all of the opinions and beliefs held and expressed by individuals.

Every individual is welcome in the library.

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.

Libraries should develop and publish policies governing access and use of exhibit spaces and meeting rooms. These policies should include viewpoint-neutral rules governing time, place, and manner of use applied equally to all users. Policies should be stated inclusively rather than exclusively: for example, a policy that makes those areas available "to organizations engaged in educational, cultural, intellectual, or charitable activities."² Libraries should welcome diverse content in their exhibit spaces and diverse ideas, individuals, and groups in their meeting rooms, even if some members of the community may object or be offended.

To uphold the Library Bill of Rights and serve the entire community, libraries and library workers should embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion.

1. "[Diversity in Collection Development: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)," Adopted July 14, 1982, by the ALA Council; amended January 10, 1990; July 2, 2008; and July 1, 2014.
2. "[Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)," Adopted July 2, 1991, by the ALA Council.