

## COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

**TO:** ALA Council

**DATE:** January 3, 2022

**RE:** (select one)

ACTION REQUESTED

INFORMATION

REPORT

**ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:** (add below)

Report: ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee

**Action requested from Councilors is to cast their vote to:** (if applicable)

None. One information item.

**ACTION REQUESTED BY:** (add committee name)

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**BACKGROUND:** (add information)

**ALA INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM COMMITTEE  
REPORT TO COUNCIL  
2022 ALA VIRTUAL LIBLEARNX**

The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) is pleased to present this update of its activities since July 21, 2021.

**IFC PRIVACY SUBCOMMITTEE**

The IFC Privacy Subcommittee has completed reorganizing its Choose Privacy Everyday website. Additionally, the [privacy landing page](#) on the main ALA site has been updated to ensure the most up-to-date information is available to library workers. Visitors to the site can now find information on why privacy is a core value, privacy laws and how to respond to law enforcement requests, students' and minors' privacy, questions and answers on privacy and confidentiality, the Privacy Guidelines and Checklists, training and programming resources, details on how to be a privacy advocate, and the newly released [Privacy Field Guides](#) (see below).

The working group formed based on the charge from ALA Council via its “[Resolution on Forming a Working Group to Align Vendor Privacy Policies with ALA Policies and Ethics](#)” continues to meet monthly. There is sustained vendor representation from Gale/Cengage, OCLC, and Overdrive. Representatives from EBSCO and ExLibris left the group without assigning new members. The group has started a Design Thinking process and is working on developing solutions to the problem, “*How might we create an open, shared community of practice that fosters a mindset of continual improvement around library user privacy?*” The working group plans to have solutions available for further exploration by the spring of 2022.

**PRIVACY FIELD GUIDES**

Further progress has been made on the creation of the [Privacy Field Guides](#), funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences, in partnership with the American Library Association. Seven guides have been finished: *How to Talk About Privacy*, *Digital Security Basics*, *Non-Tech Privacy*, *Data Lifecycles*, *Privacy Audits*, *Privacy & Vendors*, and *Privacy Policies*. Digital versions of the guides are now available on the ALA website on its Privacy landing page. An interactive companion website is slated to be completed by the end of January. Marketing for the guides will begin in February, with a limited set of physical guides being mailed to library workers across the country. Further promotion will happen at the Public Library Association’s conference in March and at the ALA annual conference in June.

## **CHALLENGES TO CRT AND DIVERSITY TRAINING TOOLKIT**

The Challenges to CRT and Diversity Training Toolkit subgroup first met by Zoom on September 22, 2021. At this meeting the subgroup reviewed the charge to the subgroup. The subgroup is creating a toolkit to prepare library workers for censorship challenges to "critical race theory" in curricula, anti-racist materials, and diversity staff trainings, as an adjunct to the ALA's Statement on Censorship of Information Addressing Racial Injustice, Black American History, and Diversity Education, approved by the ALA Executive Board in August of 2021.

The subgroup's goal is to create a resource that will prepare library workers to defend their collections, counter falsehoods, and engage their communities in important conversations about racial injustice and empowering everyone to fully participate in our democratic society. The subgroup has discussed different elements of the toolkit and has decided to use another toolkit - "Critical Race Theory and EDI Challenge Support" as a template. The subgroup began a review of the previously created toolkit to identify needed changes, and to research similar materials and toolkits created by other organizations. The subgroup members then began to draft the new toolkit and will be meeting in January to discuss the updated version of the toolkit.

## **ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO BOOKS BY PROBLEMATIC AUTHORS: Q&A**

Throughout the past year, a subgroup of members of the Intellectual Freedom Committee have worked with OIF staff to develop a question-and-answer document to clarify how library staff and educators should handle authors and content creators who are deemed "problematic" – that is, authors whose books are challenged not because of the content of their books, but because of the author's words or deeds in real life that are unrelated to the authors' published works.

The subgroup has completed its work, and following a review by the committee as a whole, the Intellectual Freedom Committee voted to approve the document "Addressing Challenges to Books by Problematic Authors: Q&A." As with other guidelines, it will be published on the main ALA website as one of several Q & As developed by the IFC. The text of the Q and A is included in this report as an Information Item (CD #19.1).

## **JOINT PROFESSIONAL VALUES PROGRAMMING SUBGROUP**

The Joint Professional Values Programming Subgroup formed after the 2021 ALA Annual Conference with members from the Intellectual Freedom Committee, IFC Privacy Subcommittee, COPE, IFRT, and FTRF convening to share resources and planning for conference programs addressing intellectual freedom and privacy. The group met twice virtually and collaborated to develop programs for LibLearnX 2022 and ALA Annual 2022.

Three LibLearnX proposals were accepted: *50+ Years in the Making: Claiming Social Justice as a Core Value*, *Problematic Authors and Problematic Works - An Intellectual Freedom Q&A* and *Advancing Social Justice Through the 9th Principle of the Code of Ethics*. Six proposals for ALA Annual 2022 were submitted covering topics such as addressing critical race theory challenges, harassment in the library, and patron privacy.

## **INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP**

The working group re-convened in September 2021 following the Executive Board's July 2021 vote to extend the term of the working group through 2022. The group continues to work cooperatively on a draft report that will respond to the charge from the ALA Council to identify alternatives to neutrality rhetoric, as instructed by the "Resolution on White Supremacy and Fascism Being Antithetical to Librarianship" adopted by ALA Council at ALA's 2021 Virtual Midwinter Meeting.

The working group will be hosting *50+ Years in the Making: Claiming Social Justice as a Core Value* at the ALA Virtual LibLearnX event in January 2022 as a vehicle to introduce the text of the draft report with ALA members and gather feedback on the report. The program will engage the audience in facilitated small-group dialogues about the role of neutrality in libraries and explore options for centering social justice as a guiding principle.

## **BANNED BOOKS WEEK**

At a time when LGBTQIA+ books and books that focus on racism and racial justice are challenged for removal from the library and school bookshelves, this year's Banned Books Week (Sept. 26 – Oct. 2) was a reminder of the unifying power of stories and the divisiveness of censorship.

This year's theme of "Books Unite Us. Censorship Divides Us." underscored how books reach across boundaries and build connections between readers. In January, OIF gathered feedback from library workers and free expression organizations on the theme and artwork. The artwork was created by [Dorothea Taylor of T.P. Design, Inc](#) and based on survey results from the book community. This year's theme was also spotlighted by Banned Books Week Honorary Chair and New York Times bestselling and banned author Jason Reynolds.

OIF offered products on both the ALA Store and the ALA Graphics Gift Shop via Spreadshirt, with support from ALA Production Services and Rachel Johnson. Materials included the Books Unite Us poster (digital and print), Field Report (digital and print), bookmarks (digital and print), T-shirts, and a water bottle.

Throughout Banned Books Week, OIF highlighted the incredible work of libraries by sharing their displays and programs, including an [intricately carved pumpkin](#), [banned book trading cards artwork](#), and [book displays](#) based on this year's theme. Banned and challenged authors also drew attention to censorship attempts, including Alex Gino, Kelly Yang, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Laurie Halse Anderson, Gene Luen Yang, Angie Thomas, Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, Ann Hazzard, Daniel Haack, Phil Bildner, Laurin Mayeno, and Robert Liu-Trujillo.

During the week, the OIF Facebook page drew nearly 1,760 post engagements (reactions, comments, post clicks) and more than 34,700 impressions. The Banned Books Week Facebook page drew around 45,150 engagements and around 690,580 impressions. The most popular posts for both the OIF and Banned Books Week Facebook pages included a link to the [Top 100 Most Banned and Challenged Books from 2010 to 2019](#). While engagement and impressions for both pages had decreased compared to last year's analytics, the comments and stories shared during the week were insightful.

The [ala.org/bbooks](#) microsite offered librarians program ideas, history, challenged books lists, infographics, and promotional tools to learn about and teach banned books year-round. During September, the microsite garnered more than 516,500 views, an increase from about 477,600 the previous year. During Banned Books Week, the number of views from banned book webpages was lower than last year's (more than 268,100 this year, compared to 344,600 in 2020). This may be partly due to last year's popular release of the Top 100 Most Challenged Books of the Past Decade, which attracted more than 65,100 views last year. The most popular pages remain the [Top 10 Most Challenged Books](#), the [homepage](#), [frequently challenged books](#), and the [about page](#). With more than 14,500 views, OIF's [free downloads page](#) offered GIFs, cover photos, infographics, videos, and activities to celebrate during the week.

The hashtag #BannedBooksWeek was also popular, with a total volume of nearly 14,100 during the week (a decrease compared to last year's 16,319). This year's campaign hashtag #BooksUniteUs received a total volume of 1,646.

During the week, OIF also hosted a letter-writing campaign titled [Dear Banned Author](#), with printable postcards and author mailing addresses.

The American Library Association, libraries, and banned and challenged authors were also spotlighted in articles during the week — from [Teen Vogue](#), [NPR](#), and [Publishers Weekly](#) to [Buzzfeed quizzes](#) and [Washington Post features](#) on Banned Books Week Coalition Chair Jason Reynolds. USA Today staff [also reviewed 30 banned and challenged titles](#) and defended what they meant to readers. OIF Director Deborah Caldwell-Stone also participated in several interviews to discuss OIF's work, censorship trends, and the impact of censorship. With support from OIF and the Freedom to Read Foundation, Kouvenda Media produced and released

[Restricted Reading](#), a new original series of short personal audio narratives that examined access to information in prison and the right to intellectual freedom for the more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in America today.

ALA also co-sponsored “[Ideas & Actions,](#)” hosted by [One World, an imprint of Random House](#), on September 29. The free virtual event asked advocates, leaders, and banned and challenged authors “What do you wish you had learned in school but didn’t?” The virtual event featured authors Ta-Nehisi Coates (*Between the World and Me*), Nikole Hannah-Jones (*The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*), Ibram X. Kendi (*How to Be an Antiracist*), and Bryan Stevenson (*Just Mercy*), Cathy Park Hong (*Minor Feelings*), Heather McGhee (*The Sum of Us*), and Adam Serwer (*The Cruelty Is the Point*).

While the freedom to read was recognized throughout the week, the Office for Intellectual Freedom was simultaneously offering support to libraries facing censorship and tracking censorship incidents. This Banned Books Week spotlighted the benefits of unrestricted reading, but it was also a reminder of where to turn to when books continue to be banned and challenged on communal shelves.

## **BOOK CHALLENGES AND CENSORSHIP**

The Office for Intellectual Freedom's staff is reporting that it has received an unprecedented number of challenge reports throughout the fall of 2021. According to OIF, there were 330 unique cases reported to it in the three-month period between September 1 and November 30, with December's reports still to be tallied. This can be compared to the 156 unique cases reported to OIF in 2020, a year marked by school and library closures, and the 377 unique cases reported to OIF in 2019 for the entire twelve months of that year.

OIF staff provided confidential counsel in 275 of those cases, consulting on policy and procedure, providing legal information related to case law and legislation, and sharing information about challenged titles.

As widely reported in news media, these books challenges are tied to an ongoing censorship campaign led by conservative advocacy groups that are targeting materials, displays, and programming reflecting LGBTQIA+ concerns and experiences for removal from library shelves. Many of these groups and individuals following them on social media are also challenging books and resources addressing the history of racism and slavery in the United States and the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and persons of color.

Some extremists have actually attempted to file charges with local law enforcement, claiming that librarians and libraries have violated obscenity statutes by providing minors access to age-appropriate materials dealing with gender or sexual identity, to date prosecutors have refused to

pursue these complaints. More alarming are statements made by elected officials in a number of states supporting the censorship of diverse books, with an accompanying promise to pass legislation to suppress or censor books based on the false claim that such works are subversive or harmful to minors.

## **ADVERSE LEGISLATION**

In October, ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy Office and Office for Intellectual Freedom, with support from other ALA offices and member leaders, convened a gathering of 147 participants, including representatives of 43 states plus the District of Columbia; 62 state organizations; 18 ALA member groups; and three external partners. The purpose of the state legislative summit was to examine adverse trends in state legislation that threaten libraries, library workers, or the ability of patrons to freely access information—and determine a course of action that leverages the full strength of the library ecosystem in responding to those trends.

Participants in the summit committed to sharing information with their respective organizations and serving as conduits for ongoing collaboration to address adverse legislation. Based on conversations during and following the summit, and in addition to ongoing direct support for states dealing with adverse legislation, we have identified four areas for focus:

- Messaging—both public facing and for the library ecosystem;
- Infrastructure—ensuring that ALA is fully leveraging internal and external relationships to strengthen the reach and impact of our work;
- Visibility—getting the broad and varied work of ALA and libraries in front of decision makers and public audiences to refocus the library narrative; and
- Legal assistance—in the short term, reviving Lawyers for Libraries; longer term, providing support on legal cases.

In late November, PPA and OIF launched a rapid response team comprised of stakeholder (staff and member) representation from across and beyond the association that will advise staff on messaging and outreach. With the beginning of a new year and new legislative sessions across the country, PPA and OIF are tracking several adverse bills similar to those discussed during the legislative summit. In early January, PPA and OIF released the [State Legislative Toolkit](#), a public-facing resource with member access to sensitive or proprietary information. The toolkit will continue to evolve based on member feedback and legislative activity.

In closing, the Intellectual Freedom Committee thanks the division and chapter intellectual freedom committees, the Intellectual Freedom Round Table, the unit liaisons, and the OIF staff. The IFC would like to again thank their outgoing members for their incredible dedication and leadership, as well as welcome incoming committee members and committee associates.

Respectfully Submitted,  
ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee

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**INFORMATION ITEM: CD #19.1: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO BOOKS BY  
PROBLEMATIC AUTHORS: Q&A**



## **ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO BOOKS BY PROBLEMATIC AUTHORS: Q&A**

Challenges to the content of books and other materials are a familiar experience for library staff. ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom has provided many resources to navigate such challenges on its online [Challenge Support page](#). However, the distinction between authors that are challenged based on the content of their work and authors that are challenged based on actions they have taken outside that work has yet to be fully explored.

This Q&A will focus on questions about the activities of an author that are unrelated to the authors' published works. These activities can include espousing problematic beliefs, giving material support to problematic causes, supporting problematic politicians and policies, harassment, cyberbullying, fraud, disinformation, and criminal activity. There are also issues when an author's problematic views influence the content of their works, further complicating the topic.

"Problematic Author" has become a label used to highlight actions by authors that are objectionable to some and impact the author's reputation. This label could be used to limit access to the author's work. Library workers must consider whether censorship is playing a role when thinking about the term problematic and deciding what library workers are responsible for and the actions we should take. As part of our professional responsibility, library workers have a duty to understand the context of each case, examine how that context impacts access to materials, and determine if actions are based on professional opinion, popular opinion, or influenced instead by personal moral standards. Each case must also be evaluated and placed within the context of history. Library workers will need to measure how the use of the term and application of the label "problematic" could impair intellectual freedom.

### **What is a problematic author? Who determines whether an author is problematic?**

In this document, problematic is a term used to refer to the actions of a person that violate some form of ethical, moral, cultural, or legal standard. Often, this term is used in relation to issues of systemic oppression and representation. In this use, problematic can include, but is not limited to, elements of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, colorism, ethno-nationalism, and other marginalization. For the purposes of this document, a problematic author is one who has committed problematic actions outside their writing.

The term problematic can be vague and subjective and mean different things to different people. There is no single authority on what is problematic. Information provided by advocacy groups

affiliated with marginalized communities are one type of resource for determining whether someone's actions are problematic. Be aware that marginalized communities are not monoliths, and a wide spectrum of perspectives exist around these conversations. What one person in a group feels is a problematic statement or view, another in that same group may feel is appropriate and reasonable.

### **What is the role of the library worker in educating their users on problematic authors?**

In ALA's [\*Library Bill of Rights\*](#), libraries are "forums for information and ideas." It is the library worker's role to provide information about authors that help the community make informed reading decisions. Library workers should do this in a way that avoids censorship and maintains impartiality.

Using the skills involved in a reference interview or readers' advisory, library workers ask questions and use their professional knowledge and current awareness to connect users with the best information to inform and educate them.

*"All resources provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of format or method of delivery, should be readily and equitably accessible to all library users."* - [\*Economic Barriers to Information Access: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights\*](#)

Creating access barriers (regardless of the activities of the author) should be thoughtfully considered. Information that may be used to recommend or dissuade from selecting or deselecting library materials should be carefully researched.

### **Can a work have value if the author is problematic?**

Readers need to be able to review and assess content on their own. A writer's failings can be used to learn about the following:

- source authority
- best practices in content evaluation
- the influence of experience and perspective

Content may or may not reflect the failings of the writer. This means that evaluating materials should be separate from evaluating the author.

It's fine for anyone to not want to read work from an author who has committed problematic acts. However, library workers shouldn't let their personal preferences override professional ethics.

### **Are there authors that are just TOO problematic?**

*"Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." —[Article 1 of the Library Bill of Rights](#)*

If the book meets the criteria of a collection development policy, then the book's author should not be a factor in the decision to acquire.

### **Is it okay to label books by problematic authors?**

No. Labeling books physically or in the catalog goes against intellectual freedom best practices. [Labeling Systems: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#) explains why this is not okay:

*"Prejudicial labels are designed to restrict access, based on a value judgment that the content, language, or themes of the resource, or the background or views of the creator(s) of the resource, render it inappropriate or offensive for all or certain groups of users."*

Libraries don't have the authority or ability to make a determination about the appropriateness of the author's background. As a result, they don't have the authority to create a label.

Furthermore, [Labeling Systems: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#) outright opposes prejudicial labeling:

*"The American Library Association opposes the use of prejudicial labeling systems and affirms the rights of individuals to form their own opinions about resources they choose to read, view, listen to, or otherwise access."*

## **RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Do library workers need to investigate the creators of a work before selection?**

No. Library workers should select materials for their collections based on the content of the work itself. They shouldn't select based on the activity of the author.

There are a few reasons when knowing more about the author, their actions, and the context of those actions could be helpful:

- During reference interviews
- During other service interactions
- When discussing the author and their actions with a user

However, library workers shouldn't let their own personal views impact how the author is presented or accessed.

### **What role do special collections or special libraries play?**

Public pressure to isolate materials by problematic authors shouldn't be the reason for creating a special collection. This is especially true for school and public libraries.

- *Are you still going to put materials into a special collection because of the problematic author's reputation?* Then be sure to clarify the intention and purpose of the collection.
- *Was the special collection created to isolate and segregate materials by problematic authors?* That's not okay. Doing that creates barriers and limits access by intentional act. This is intentional censorship.

Special libraries are different. They are often more discerning and intentional with content selection. The scope and mission of specialized collections are often limited to a historical era. These collections are curated for a specific group of professional practitioners. Or they are limited in scope to an area of research.

Special collections acquisition policies differ greatly from public, school, or academic libraries. This is because intentionality and integrity of the collection is interdependent on the accuracy of materials.

However, the content of the material should be a larger factor in determining acquisition or retention of materials. Excluding an author because of problematic behavior depends on the scope and mission of the collection. Example: a copy of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie probably should be included in a special collection focusing on works by Indigenous authors. Excluding that book from a special or regular collection would devalue the integrity of the collection. It would also hinder research and resource accessibility.

### **What about public libraries that receive government-funding? Do they have a different responsibility than other libraries?**

Like challenged books, challenged authors are subject to the court of public opinion. The public is vast and varied. Therefore, the best defense here is a well-crafted collection development policy. These policies should include the following:

- retention cycles
- holds ratios
- specific criteria for removal of material that is not based on individual opinion

It is the responsibility of all libraries to serve every member of their designated communities. This means libraries must provide access to a diversity of materials and authors. Some material may be offensive and/or controversial to some users. Public libraries cannot reject and remove a resource because an individual or a group doesn't like the material or the author.

Libraries must provide access to material that may be controversial to some users. However, they should also provide a challenge process. This process should allow individuals or groups to formally request reconsideration of materials or authors they find offensive or inaccurate.

**Does my library need to remove an item from the collection because the publisher or author has asked? If the publisher has withdrawn a book, does that mean libraries should withdraw all books by the author?**

Libraries don't need to follow the wishes and/or demands of the publisher or the author.

Example:

- The publisher decides to cease publication of a given title.
- The publisher demands that it be removed from the shelves.
- It's the library's choice if it will follow through with such a request.

It's the role of library workers—not publishers or authors—to critically evaluate and maintain existing collections in accordance with the library's collection development policy.

**What happens if the author has other books that have not been pulled by publishers?**

*"Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." —Article I of the ALA's [Library Bill of Rights](#)*

Here's what you can do to prepare for and support Article 1 in this situation:

- **Prepare:** Anticipate that the public or staff may have questions about these materials.
- **Train:** Ensure all staff know and understand the following:
  - library's reconsideration policy
  - proper procedures for [responding to a library user's concerns](#)
- **Review:** Make sure materials don't need to be de-accessed for reasons other than the following:
  - Origin
  - Background
  - Views of the creator

- **Collection Development Policy:** Verify that your collection development policy explains how the collection is maintained (Example: weeding).

**What about books that are no longer supported or printed by the publisher because of allegations of sexual impropriety or other reasons, such as racism? What is our responsibility as library workers in maintaining these books in our collection?**

*"We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations." —Preamble of the [ALA Code of Ethics](#)*

As library workers, we must maintain a robust collection of materials. Those materials should represent the full spectrum of the human condition. There aren't specific criteria for what materials should fill that need. Library workers strive for excellence "by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills." As such, we should seek current awareness in the field. This allows us to balance the publisher's reasoning with up-to-date knowledge of what materials can round out a collection.

The [Library Bill of Rights](#) says "materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." However, the Library Bill of Rights doesn't force library ownership of any particular material. Instead, the Library Bill of Rights states, "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues."

According to *Evaluating Library Collections: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*, "Failure to select resources merely because they may be potentially controversial is censorship, as is withdrawing resources for the same reason."

Refer to your collection maintenance policies to evaluate work that is no longer supported/printed. These collection maintenance policies should balance opposition to censorship with the diversity of the library's collection.

*"Some resources may contain views, opinions, and concepts that were popular or widely held at one time but are now considered outdated, offensive, or harmful. Content creators may also come to be considered offensive or controversial." —[Evaluating Library Collections: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)*

**Should books by problematic authors be included in school curriculums and reading lists? If so, should educators address or point-out the actions of the author?**

Educators should decide. They can determine if a resource fits the need of the educational purpose by evaluating the content.

Decisions on whether or not to inform students, parents, or colleagues on the actions or beliefs of an author should be made based on the relevancy and timeliness of the information. Library workers need to select materials for their collections based on the content of the work itself and not the activity of the author.

Students should be free to read and examine any published works in the school library's collection. There may be many publications in library collections that would not stand the test of today's awareness of social harms with regard to the author. The purpose of collecting works is to retain the history of thought, not to judge it.

## **ACTION**

### **When should a library take action regarding a problematic author?**

Controversial authors are not new issues in librarianship. What is new is that publishers and authors are proactively ceasing publication of titles due to concerns about an author's character, viewpoints, or actions. Publishers may even ask libraries to rid their collections of these materials.

Library staff must carefully review their collection development policy prior to taking any steps. Just as a library should never remove a book because of one person or group's objection, it should not remove a book just because the publisher has asked them to do so.

ALA's [Library Bill of Rights](#) states that, "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."

### **How should libraries and library workers respond to concerns about owning or using a resource by a problematic author?**

Library workers recognize that full, confidential, and unrestricted access to information is essential to intellectual freedom. Reading, listening, and viewing are individual, private matters. Anyone is free to select or reject materials for themselves. However, the freedom of others to read or inquire, even of problematic authors, should not be restricted.

Selection and use of library resources does not mean endorsement of views expressed in those materials. It also does not mean an endorsement of the actions or views of their creator. The existence of a particular viewpoint or author in the collection is a reflection of the library's policy of intellectual freedom. It is not an endorsement of that particular point of view or person.

Library users are an important part of the selection process. Requests from users, regardless of problematic labels, are often considered when libraries make material selections.

*“Best practices in collection development assert that materials should not be excluded from a collection solely because the content or its creator may be considered offensive or controversial. Refusing to select resources due to potential controversy is considered censorship, as is withdrawing resources for that reason.”* —[Diverse Collections: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)

**Am I required to purchase or display a resource that I find problematic? Should libraries promote books written by problematic authors in their displays or programs? How should libraries manage promoting or not promoting titles by problematic authors?**

Libraries are not required to purchase anything. However, you should strongly consider resources if they match these criteria:

- They meet requirements of your collection development policy.
- They have been suggested for purchase.

As for displays, [Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#) states the following:

*“Library-initiated programs and displays utilize library worker expertise for community interests, collections, services, facilities, and providing access to information and information resources. They introduce users and potential users to library resources and the library’s role as a facilitator of information access.”*

If you believe a resource does not advance the purpose of the display, then do not include it.

**How do we deal with items already in circulation? How do we craft collection development and acquisitions guidelines for published, but not acquired titles?**

Materials created by problematic authors are included in a collection when they meet the selection criteria set by the library. Selecting materials is a key function that libraries use to fulfill their mission in the community. By including materials from all types of fallible humans within the collection, libraries will inevitably contain materials that are offensive to some members of the community.



Libraries need to have a policy and procedure in place to handle these objections. This policy should establish the framework for registering a complaint. That framework should provide for a review process with appropriate actions while defending and supporting the following:

- principles of freedom of information
- right of users to access materials
- professional responsibility
- integrity of the library workers involved in the selection process

The principles of intellectual freedom are inherent in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and are expressed in the [Library Bill of Rights](#) and the [ALA Code of Ethics](#). If materials are questioned, the principles of intellectual freedom should be defended rather than the materials.

As stated in the Code of Ethics:

*"We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources."*

### **What do I do if my colleague is the person who refuses to purchase or deselected works by problematic authors?**

If you feel comfortable, reach out to the colleague, and explain your concern. Explain that their actions are violating the intellectual freedom rights of your users per the [Library Bill of Rights](#). Explain that their actions are potentially violating the collection development policy of your institution. Reach out to other colleagues, library management, and the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom for support and further resources.

Where can I find more information?

Questions about problematic authors can be directed to the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom by phone at (312) 280-4226 or by email at [oif@ala.org](mailto:oif@ala.org).

### **Works Cited**

Garnar, Martin and Magi, Trina (Eds.), [Intellectual Freedom Manual](#), tenth edition (2021), Chicago: ALA Editions.