

PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Intellectual freedom is the principle that all people have the right to seek, receive, and explore information from a wide range of sources and viewpoints. In public libraries, this means providing access to materials and services that reflect many interests, needs, and perspectives so that individuals can make their own choices about what to read, view, or explore.

Public libraries serve entire communities. Intellectual freedom ensures that the library remains a place where curiosity is supported, ideas can be explored, and information is available without judgment or restriction based on personal beliefs.

Public libraries are often one of the few spaces where people can freely access information without cost, pressure, or expectation. Upholding intellectual freedom:

- Supports lifelong learning and informed decision-making.
- Protects individual choice and privacy.
- Builds trust between the library and the community.
- Reinforces the library's role as a neutral provider of information.

What Intellectual Freedom Looks Like in Practice

Collection Development

- Materials are selected using written policies and professional reviews.
- Collections reflect a broad range of subjects, interests, and formats.
- Selection is based on relevance, quality, and community needs, not personal opinion.

Access to Materials

- Items are available without labeling or restriction beyond standard age or policy guidelines.
- Patrons choose materials for themselves and for those in their care.

Programming and Displays

- Programs and displays are designed to inform, educate, and engage.
- Topics may reflect current interests, seasonal themes, or community curiosity.
- Participation is voluntary, and libraries offer a variety of options over time.

Privacy and Confidentiality

- Patron records and reading choices are kept confidential.
- Library staff respect users' rights to explore information privately.

Handling Concerns or Challenges

Public librarians may occasionally receive questions or concerns about materials or programs.

When this happens:

- Listen respectfully and acknowledge the concern.
- Refer to the library's collection development or reconsideration policy.
- Explain the library's role in providing access rather than endorsement.
- Follow established procedures consistently and professionally.

Clear policies and calm communication help maintain trust and transparency.

The Librarian's Role

Librarians are not responsible for deciding what patrons should think or believe. Instead, they:

- Provide access to information
- Support informed choice
- Apply policies fairly and consistently
- Maintain welcoming, respectful spaces for all users

Intellectual freedom is about access. By upholding this principle, public libraries continue to serve as places where individuals can explore ideas, discover information, and engage with the world on their own terms.