Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries

"The library is a growing organism"
S.R. Ranganathan (1931)

Why Do I Need a Policy?

Every library — academic, public, and school (public, private, charter, independent, and international) — should have a comprehensive written policy that guides the selection, deselection or weeding, and reconsideration of library resources. The most valuable selection policy is current; it is reviewed and revised on a regular basis; and it is familiar to all members of a library's staff. The policy should be approved by the library's governing board or other policy-making body and disseminated widely for understanding by all stakeholders.

The policy:

- Ensures that the selection of materials reflects the institution’s philosophy, mission, guiding principles, or other foundational documents
- Provides a framework for the consistent selection and acquisition of library resources in all formats using a standard set of criteria
- Avoids haphazard patterns of acquisition that will result in waste or overlap of content
- States who is responsible for selection and the parameters under which the individual(s) work, but allows for professional judgment
- Ensures a diversity of viewpoints on all topics, including those that may be considered controversial
- Identifies cooperative collection development arrangements such as resource sharing including interlibrary loans, agreements to purchase or lease e-content, and resource retention commitments (for example, archival materials, government documents, local author materials)
- Provides standards for collection maintenance and the removal of library resources that are out-of-date, inaccurate or no longer reflect the consensus of the field, in poor condition, rarely used, in an obsolete format, no longer fit the needs of library patrons, or have excess copies
- Supplies guidelines for consideration of gifts and donations
- Establishes a process by which individuals may share their concerns about library resources in a discussion with a librarian or, if their concerns are unresolved, invoke a formal reconsideration process
- Affirms the importance of intellectual freedom, referencing key documents such as the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the Library Bill of Rights, and the Freedom to Read Statement

Politics and Timing of Policy Creation

If your library does not have a selection policy, the time to begin writing one is today. Every library needs an up-to-date selection policy with a reconsideration process; however, the time to write the policy or make changes is not during a formal challenge to a library resource. Wait to begin policy creation, or make revisions, until after the final decision in a reconsideration process has been made to prevent any appearance of manipulating the process. Following a challenge is the ideal time to reflect on the experience and use that new knowledge to write or revamp a policy.

Local politics can have considerable influence on a governing board’s or committee’s adoption of library policy. In most cases, a library’s or school’s governing board, or in some cases a university
committee, must approve its selection policy. Members of these groups may bring a variety of political perspectives but also establish credibility and ensure local buy-in to the selection policy approval process.

When a library is governed by a board, the ideal orientation process for new board members will include a grounding in the principles of intellectual freedom and the library’s role in encouraging freedom of inquiry and the development of an informed citizenry or a student body with an ability to weigh competing ideas and draw informed conclusions. A board with a good grounding in these principles is better prepared for its role in adopting a materials selection policy and hearing challenges to library materials. If the board has not received this type of orientation at the time of their election or appointment, it is prudent to offer this information before it embarks on selection policy approval.

Training for public library trustees is offered by some state libraries, although this is not the case for school boards. Librarians can seek assistance from the American Library Association (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom, which offers Advocacy & Intellectual Freedom Bootcamps to library boards and trustees. The ALA Intellectual Freedom Manual is another excellent resource and points to such foundational documents as the U.S. Constitution, the Library Bill of Rights and its interpretations, and the Freedom to Read Statement.

Academic libraries have many different governance structures. Librarians and/or library departments and committees write, develop, or revise selection policies. When approval outside the library is needed, academic librarians should work within the structure of the academic institution to seek official approval of such policies.

**Support for Intellectual Freedom**

Intellectual freedom is the right of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment. Intellectual freedom is one of the core values of the library profession; it promotes access to information and guides the defense against censorship.

The Freedom to Read Statement asserts, “The freedom to read is essential to our democracy.” In a democratic society, individuals must be sufficiently knowledgeable to make informed decisions. Libraries provide their users with necessary information through a wide selection of materials from varying points of view. It is essential that library resources remain free to use for all, regardless of age. The Library Bill of Rights and its interpretations lay out rationales for these principles of intellectual freedom. Incorporating the tenets of intellectual freedom foundational documents (such as the First Amendment, the Library Bill of Rights, and the Freedom to Read Statement) into the selection policy provides support for intellectual freedom as a philosophy underlying the policy. Strong selection policies include a statement of support for intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom policy statements are often attached to selection policies.

**Example: School Library Support for Intellectual Freedom**

The school libraries of this district are guided by the principles set forth in the Library Bill of Rights and its interpretative statements, including “Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Program” and The Students’ Right to Read statement of the National Council of Teachers of English. See Appendix (in this policy) for the Library Bill of Rights, “Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Program,” and The Students’ Right to Read statement.
Objectives

A selection policy should state in broad general terms what a public, school, or academic library is trying to accomplish and then more specifically its objectives of selection. The objective of the selection policy should state its purpose within the context of the strategic plan of the library.

Public School District Selection Policy Objectives

Objectives are, of necessity, broad and should relate to the mission of the school and its instructional program. Instructional and library materials are selected by the school district to implement, enrich, and support the educational program and personal interests of each student.

Example: School Library Selection Policy Objectives

- To provide faculty and students with materials that enrich and support the curriculum and meet the needs of the students and faculty served
- To provide students with a wide range of educational materials on all levels of difficulty and in a variety of formats, with diversity of appeal, allowing for the presentation of many different points of view
- To select materials that present various sides of controversial issues, giving students an opportunity to develop analytical skills resulting in informed decisions
- To select materials in all formats, including up-to-date, high quality, varied literature to develop and strengthen a love of reading

Classroom Collection Selection Policy Objectives

A classroom collection is defined as an informally arranged group of fiction and non-fiction books collected and housed in a classroom and used by the students assigned to that classroom.

While classroom collections are excellent tools for encouraging reading for pleasure, they should not be seen as a replacement for a quality school library collection and program, as well as a certified, professional school librarian. Because classroom collections serve as part of the curriculum, they should be part of the instructional materials selection and reconsideration policy.

Example: Classroom Collection Selection Policy Objectives

- To provide students with materials that will enrich and support the curriculum and meet the needs of the students served in an individual classroom
- To provide students with a wide range of educational materials with varying levels of difficulty, in a variety of formats, with diversity of appeal, and allowing for the presentation of different points of view

Responsibility for Selection

In public and academic libraries, the governing body of the institution is technically responsible for the resources in its library; however, it often delegates this responsibility to others. In school libraries, the school board is legally responsible for the resources in school libraries; however, it often delegates this to the professional school library staff. Although many people contribute to the selection process by recommending resources for the library in an advisory capacity, the policy
should clearly state that the responsibility for coordinating and making final decisions rests with the library professional staff.

**School Library Responsibility for Selection**

Although the Board of Education or governing authority is legally responsible for the resources used in a school, it delegates the selection of the library's resources to its professional school library personnel. Many selection policies direct the library professional to seek recommendations and work collaboratively with others in the school community during the selection process. Teachers, students, administrators, and others participate by making recommendations; however, strong policies state that the final responsibility for the selection decisions rests with the school library professional.

**Example: School Library Responsibility for Selection**

The elected Board of Education shall delegate to the superintendent of schools or district administrator the authority and responsibility for selection of library materials in all formats. Responsibility for actual selection rests with professionally trained library personnel using the board's adopted selection criteria and procedures.

**Selection Criteria**

For library professionals to make informed choices, selection policies for all types of libraries — public libraries, academic libraries, technical school libraries, and school libraries (public and private) — should include criteria to guide in the resource selection process. The criteria should be a blend of general, specific, and technical to enable library staff to select materials in all subject areas and formats. In addition to criteria such as appropriateness to the age and level of the user, librarians must also consider creating a collection that reflects diversity of ideas and authors as well as being reflective of the population the library serves.

**Guidance on Selection Criteria**

Selection policies should include specific criteria to guide professionals in purchasing items. The criteria should be relevant to the library's objectives: excellence (artistic, literary, visual, etc.), appropriateness to level of user, authoritative and varying perspectives on controversial issues, accessibility, and ability to stimulate further intellectual and social development. Librarians should consider authenticity, public demand, general interest, content, and circumstances of use. For libraries serving minors, librarians should consider age, social and emotional development, intellectual level, interest level, and reading level. Technical criteria should be included in the policy (for example, clarity of sound in audio materials, quality of cinematography in video, and quality of graphics in games).

**School Library Selection Criteria**

School libraries vary and include libraries in public schools, charter schools, independent private schools, schools with religious affiliations, and international schools based in countries outside the United States. Criteria for selection of materials in these libraries are dependent on the goals and objectives of the educational institution of which the library is a part of; however, there are general criteria that will fit most, if not all, school libraries.

**Example: School Library Selection Criteria**

**General Criteria:**

- Support and enrich the curriculum and/or students' personal interests and learning
- Meet high standards in literary, artistic, and aesthetic quality; technical aspects; and physical format
- Be appropriate for the subject area and for the age, emotional development, ability level, learning styles, and social, emotional, and intellectual development of the students for whom the materials are selected
- Incorporate accurate and authentic factual content from authoritative sources
- Earn favorable reviews in standard reviewing sources and/or favorable recommendations based on preview and examination of materials by professional personnel
- Exhibit a high degree of potential user appeal and interest
- Represent differing viewpoints on controversial issues
- Provide a global perspective and promote diversity by including materials by authors and illustrators of all cultures
- Include a variety of resources in physical and virtual formats including print and non-print such as electronic and multimedia (including subscription databases and other online products, e-books, educational games, and other forms of emerging technologies)
- Demonstrate physical format, appearance, and durability suitable to their intended use
- Balance cost with need

**Top Five Recommended School Library Reviewing Sources:**

- Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) Notable Children’s Books
- Booklist
- School Library Journal
- We Need Diverse Books website
- Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Best Books for Young Adults

**Additional Review Resources**

**Acquisitions Procedures**

Acquisitions procedures should describe all steps from initial screening to final selection. It is important to list the type of materials that are collected, why they are needed, and how they are obtained.

In addition to selection of new resources, policies on re-evaluation (weeding), replacing and repairing materials, and gift materials may also be included. The specific procedures for acquiring material for a library’s collection will vary between library types and individual libraries. Patron recommendations for acquisitions are often encouraged in all library types. Selectors are responsible for reading reviews and staying informed about current trends in purchasing, and the library’s professional staff is responsible for making the final decisions about acquiring material.

**Acquisitions Procedures in School Libraries**

Because most school libraries have only a single school librarian, that individual is responsible for creating a collection to support instruction, literacy, and students’ recreational reading. Materials selection policies generally mandate that the library professional seek input from teachers, other professional staff, and students. School librarians are also responsible for weeding or de-selecting collection materials following policy guidelines as well as making a decision as to whether gift items will be accepted.

**Example: School Library Acquisitions Procedures**

- In selecting learning resources, professional personnel will evaluate available resources and curriculum needs and will consult reputable, professionally prepared aids to
selection, and other appropriate sources. The actual resource will be examined whenever possible.

- Recommendations for purchase involve administrators, teachers, students, district personnel, and community members, as appropriate.
- Gift materials shall be judged by the selection criteria and shall be accepted or rejected by those criteria.
- Selection is an ongoing process that should include removing materials that are no longer used or needed, adding materials, and replacing lost and worn materials that still have educational value.

Special Collections

Public, school, and academic libraries often have “special areas” within their collections. These special collections are often resources in a variety of formats that are distinctive and have intrinsic value to the institution. Special areas can include rare books, genealogy materials, archives, local history, theses, and books from local authors. The selection of materials for these special areas should be consistent with the institution’s mission, policy, and history, as well as the user’s needs. The selection criteria should include guidelines that build on the preservation and enhancement of these important collections. The policy addressing special collections should include the scope and specific purpose of the collection. Special collections often have unique attributes that require libraries to limit access, control the physical environment, or deny circulation. Security is not based on controversial content but rather the value, rarity, or fragility of the item.

School Library Special Collections

Special collections in school libraries should reflect the unique character and mission of the schools in which these libraries serve. Within a school district, different schools may have different needs. As a result, each school library may have different priorities within its collections or special collections. Therefore, if a special collection is needed in a school library, then that school library should have a school-specific selection policy providing guidelines for the special collections in addition to the district-wide selection policy. One example is a school library with a magnet focus in specific curriculum areas. A school with a specialized curriculum may have special collections that support those areas.

Policies on Selecting Materials on Controversial Topics

It is the responsibility of all libraries to serve every member of their designated communities. It is not the responsibility of a library to promote one point of view over another. This requires that libraries collect material that represents majority beliefs as well as minority beliefs. The American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement provide ethical guidance to librarians on these issues. In providing access to a diversity of materials, some material may be offensive and/or controversial to some patrons. Libraries cannot reject and remove a resource because an individual or a group has found the material objectionable. Libraries must provide access to material that may be controversial to some patrons, while also providing a process by which individuals or groups may formally request reconsideration of material they find offensive or inaccurate.

Selecting Materials on Controversial Topics in School Libraries

The majority of users served in school libraries are minors, and American society is often very protective of its youth. These two facts create challenges for school librarians selecting materials on a range of perspectives on topics which may be considered controversial by some in the school community. Hot button topics that may be deemed controversial and offensive to some range from LGBTQ-themed resources to politics, race relations, and sexually explicit language. Court decisions
including *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969) *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District v. Pico* (1982) established that minors do have First Amendment rights in schools including the right to receive information. Ethically, school librarians find guidance for selecting resources which may be considered controversial in the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights, the American Library Association’s Code of Ethics, and the Freedom to Read Statement. Therefore, school librarians are ethically responsible to provide access to resources with varying perspectives for students’ curricular and personal information needs.

**Example: School Library Selection of Materials on Controversial Topics**

The school board subscribes to the principles expressed in the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights. It is the responsibility of the school district to provide a wide range of materials on different levels of difficulty and representing different points of view. School library professional staff will provide materials on opposing viewpoints on controversial issues to enable students to develop necessary critical thinking skills to be discriminate users of information and productive members of society.

**Gifts and Donations**

The acquisition of gifts and donations can be a valuable part of every library’s collection development strategy. All libraries should have a gift and donation policy that clearly describes the terms of acceptance and outlines all steps from the evaluation process to the acknowledgement letter. This policy and set of procedures is usually found in the institution’s selection policy and/or acquisitions document. Specific procedures for acquiring donated materials varies among library types. As with all material selection, the acquisition of gifts and donations should be consistent with the institution’s mission and policies.

Libraries are often faced with donations from well-meaning people who assume older materials are welcomed as additions to the library’s collection. In all cases, it is important to explain to donors that their gifts and/or donations are accepted only if they meet the library’s selection criteria. Organizations with points of view and authors promoting their own work may also donate materials. Due to limited space, time, and staffing, some libraries may decide not to accept donations or may decide to limit the types of donations that are accepted. If a library decides not to accept donations or decides to limit donations, a statement describing the policy should be a part of the library’s acquisition document. If the library accepts donations, it is important to state that the donated item becomes the property of the library and will not be returned to the donor if it is not added to the collection.

**School Library Gifts and Donations**

School libraries are often the beneficiaries of donations and gifts. Although these libraries frequently experience tight budgets, school librarians should thank donors for their consideration and tactfully inform donors that all donations and gifts are evaluated using the same selection criteria laid out in the selection policy as purchased materials. Additionally, school librarians might maintain a list of suggested titles that donors might purchase as gifts in honor or memory of individuals for the school library collection.

**Example: School Library Gifts and Donations**

Gifts and donations to the school library are accepted with the understanding that the decision for use and disposition of the materials and/or funds will be determined using the same selection criteria as purchased materials. All materials should support the curriculum and needs of library users. Gifts and donations, like purchased resources, will be removed from the collection at the end of their useful life.
Collection Maintenance and Weeding

Regardless of the type of institution, collection maintenance and weeding are important components of a library’s collection management system and are often related to the goals and mission of the organization. Regardless of format, an optimal library collection is one that is reviewed on a consistent basis for accuracy, currency, usage, diversity, and subject area gaps. When evaluating print or another tangible medium, collection maintenance usually involves the continual care of the materials, including accurate and efficient shelving (and re-shelving), shelf-reading, shifting, and cleaning. With digital materials, collection maintenance includes consideration of continued sufficient coverage of databases or other electronic reference sources, checking for dead or broken links and evaluating these links for accuracy, currency, and relevancy.

Weeding or the deselection of material is critical to collection maintenance and involves the removal of resources from the collection. All materials are considered for weeding based on accuracy, currency, and relevancy. Space limitations, edition, format, physical condition, and number of copies are considered when evaluating physical materials. While weeding is essential to the collection development process, it should not be used as a deselection tool for controversial materials (see the Library Bill of Rights). Note: Step-by-step guidelines on weeding and removal procedures are not typically found in a policy but in a procedural manual. There are many weeding resources available online to provide guidance to library staff.

School Library Collection Maintenance and Weeding

School librarians should develop policies to guide collection maintenance and weeding to ensure that materials and resources are available to students and staff and also to more efficiently manage the collection. These policies should include guidance on repair, replacement, and removal of materials. Weeding of the collection should also be guided by clear policies to determine when items should be removed and if they should be replaced with newer, updated content. Conducting regular inventories of the collection is also an essential component of collection maintenance and weeding.

Collection maintenance and weeding policies should also specify who repairs materials and is responsible for weeding and inventory. Policies should provide guidance about disposal of weeded items.

Example: School Library Collection Maintenance and Weeding

Annually, the school librarian will conduct an inventory of the school library collection and equipment. The inventory can be used to determine losses and remove damaged or worn materials which can then be considered for replacement. The inventory can also be used to deselect and remove materials that are no longer relevant to the curriculum or of interest to students. Additionally, school librarians should develop a collection maintenance plan that includes systematic inspection of materials that would result in weeding outdated, damaged, or irrelevant materials from the collection.

Policy Revision

No policy remains valid forever. Internal or external changes may impact a library policy and result in the need for policy revision. All library policies, including the selection policy, should be reviewed for necessary revisions on a regular schedule.

1) Removing Outdated Statements

Many selection policies reference intellectual freedom documents such as the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights. Frequently a copy of the actual document is appended to the
policy. The School Library Bill of Rights is referenced in many school district selection policies. Created by the American Association of School Libraries in 1955, the document was withdrawn by the association in 1976 and replaced by “Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” in 1986. When professional association policy statements are removed or revised, corresponding action should be reflected in a library’s resources selection policy. The selection policy must reference the most up-to-date association policy statements. For example, the Association of College & Research Libraries adopted the most current version of “Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries” in 1999.

2) Politics and the Timing of Policy Revision

No revision should be undertaken while a formal challenge to a library resource is occurring. It is important to follow the current governing board-approved policy and process to maintain good faith with the community, complainants, and supporters. Revisions should occur after the final decision on the questioned material has been made. When a challenge has been resolved, those involved should reflect on the reconsideration experience and use new knowledge to revamp the current policy.

3) Consideration of New Material Formats for Inclusion

The process for including new material formats (e.g. online databases, ebooks, streaming media, games, apps) should be ongoing. Factors to consider in this decision include current demand, trends or growth in demand, and strengths and weaknesses of the format. Accessibility to patrons with special needs should also be considered when purchasing materials. Evaluating new material formats based on these criteria prepares the library to meet patron demands.

Reconsideration

Community members will voice concerns or submit formal complaints to library materials. 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 provides for a review process with appropriate actions while defending the principles of freedom of information, the right of patrons to access materials, and the professional responsibility and integrity of the librarians 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, adopted by the Council of the American Library Association. If materials are questioned, the principles of intellectual freedom should be defended rather than the materials.

Statement of Policy

The reconsideration section in the selection policy establishes the framework for any person or group registering a complaint or formal challenge to library resources and possible resolutions for all involved. The procedure for handling complaints and for reconsidering challenged materials should be clearly enunciated in the policy statement and applicable to everyone. The policy should stress that no materials will be removed without following the full reconsideration policy and no materials should be removed upon the authority of a single staff member or administrator. Avenues of appeal to the library’s board, oversight committee, or governing body should be clearly presented for both those who seek a work’s removal and those who desire its retention. In this section, sample policy text and procedures are offered to assist library staff to manage informal verbal complaints and formal written challenges fairly and confidently.
School Library Reconsideration

School libraries receive a large number of complaints about their library resources. It is important for school librarians to be prepared for both oral complaints and the possibility of informal concerns becoming requests for formal reconsideration. Part of being prepared is having a current board-approved selection policy with both informal and formal reconsideration procedures and having library staff, administrators, and school board members be familiar with the document. Additionally, having annual conversations with the principal about the selection policy, including reviewing the reconsideration process, ensures that administrators are familiar with and able to respond to library resource complaints. In determining who should have the right to bring forth an informal or formal request for reconsideration, districts should consider the ramifications of limiting or expanding who can request reconsideration. Too limiting may result in individuals seeking means to challenge materials outside of the formal procedures for reconsideration. Too broad may result in outside pressure groups utilizing the reconsideration procedures to bring multiple challenges to force their perspectives.

Example: School Library Reconsideration Policy

Despite the careful selection of library resources and the qualification of those involved in the selection process, objections to library resources that are deemed offensive or inappropriate may occur. Any resident, employee, or student of the school district may express an informal concern or formal request for reconsideration of a library resource.

Informal Complaints

Individuals who are concerned about the appropriateness of library resources may make informal complaints in public and to library staff members. In schools, the complainant may voice the objection to the school librarian, a teacher, or the principal. In some cases, the individuals simply want their objections heard and have their concerns acknowledged; while in other situations, the person making the complainant asks public, academic, or school staff to restrict or remove the library resource. One important part of the informal complaint process is listening respectfully to the complainant’s concerns. Although listening to a person’s complaint is sometimes as far as an oral complaint goes, it is necessary for every library to have a process for handling informal patron concerns. A formal complaint process often follows a verbal discussion with a library staff member, library director, teacher, or school principal and acknowledges the right of the individual to express a concern and have their objections formally reviewed.

Example: School Library Procedures for Handling Informal Complaints

Persons with a complaint about library print or digital resources should state their concerns to the school librarian or principal. The librarian or principal will listen attentively to the concerns and attempt to resolve the issue informally. As part of the discussion, the school employee will explain the library’s selection policy, selection criteria, diversity of the collection with resources from many points of view, and the selection process. Additionally, each parent/guardian has the right to determine the appropriateness of library resources for their children and should accord the same right to other families.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, the librarian or principal will explain the formal reconsideration process and provide the individual with a copy of the school district’s library selection policy with reconsideration procedures and a request for reconsideration of library resources form. If there is concern about multiple items, a separate form must be completed for each item. All complaints to staff members shall be reported to the building principal, whether received by telephone, letter, or in personal conversation. No library resources should be removed or restricted from use as a result of the informal complaint.
If the completed and signed formal request for reconsideration form has not been received by the principal within two weeks, the matter shall be considered closed.

**Formal Reconsideration**

Persons who are concerned about the appropriateness of library resources or are unsatisfied with the response from an informal discussion about a title may choose to make a formal request for reconsideration of the work in question. A formal reconsideration request is a written document that is usually reviewed by an assigned library staff member or committee. In order to provide a standard method for receiving patron input, every library should have a written process for handling formal complaints as part of the reconsideration policy. This will serve as a guideline when reviewing, evaluating, and processing formal reconsideration requests. Adding timeline requirements to the reconsideration process ensures that complainants concerns will be addressed in a timely fashion. Timelines should be determined based on the needs of your institution.

**Example: School Library Procedures for Handling Formal Complaints**

The following procedures should be followed if, after discussing the questioned resource, no resolution is made.

1. The complainant should be referred to the principal.
2. A concerned citizen who is dissatisfied with earlier informal discussions will be offered a packet of materials which includes the library’s mission statement, selection policy, request for reconsideration of instructional resources form, and the Library Bill of Rights.
3. The complainant is required to complete and submit the reconsideration form to the principal within ten business days.
4. If a completed reconsideration form is not submitted within ten business days, the matter is considered closed.
5. Upon receipt of the form, the principal should notify and provide a copy of the reconsideration form with the following individuals:
   a. Superintendent
   b. School Library Advisory Committee/Reconsideration Committee
   c. School librarian
   d. School library department director
6. The work in question will remain on library shelves and in circulation until a formal decision is made.
7. The Reconsideration Committee will be appointed by the principal and consist of a teacher, a building level administrator, a school librarian, a reading specialist or language arts teacher, and a member of the community. Makeup of the committee varies depending on the school district.
8. The school librarian will secure copies of the resource for the committee to review.
9. The school librarian will provide the reviewing committee with a short formal Intellectual Freedom training that explains a packet of materials, which includes the library's mission statement, selection policy, the Library Bill of Rights, the completed reconsideration form, reviews of the resource being reconsidered, and a list of awards or honors, if any. This packet should be created with assistance from the state department of public instruction and the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom.
10. Through interlibrary loan or other means, the school librarian will obtain copies of the material in question for review by the Reconsideration Committee.
11. The Reconsideration Committee (which should include the school librarian) should schedule a formal reconsideration meeting within 10 school days after the principal
receives the written request for reconsideration. The principal should notify the superintendent and the school library department director as to this schedule.

12. The school level Reconsideration Committee should follow the procedures listed below:
   a. At the initial meeting, the principal and committee will review reconsideration committee guidelines and procedures. A school administrator should fully participate in the reconsideration process.
   b. A member of the committee should keep minutes.
   c. All committee members should fully review the resource (read or view the entire work) before voting.
   d. The committee reserves the right to use outside expertise if necessary to help in its decision-making process.
   e. The complainant may make an initial verbal presentation about the resource under reconsideration or may choose to share the written form. The complainant is asked to provide sources for quotes used during this presentation.
   f. The complainant may not participate in or observe the committee’s deliberations unless invited to do so by the committee. The committee chair may choose to give committee members time to ask questions.
   g. During the initial or subsequent meetings, the committee will make its decision determined by the simple majority to retain, move the resources to a different level, or remove the resource. This will be a secret ballot vote.
   h. The committee's written decision (including a minority report if needed) shall be presented to the complainant, the superintendent of schools, and the school library department director within five school days after the decision is made.
   i. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision at the school level, a written appeal can be made within 10 school days to a system-level Educational Resource Reconsideration Committee. This request should be delivered to the superintendent of schools.

13. The District-Level Reconsideration Committee will consider any appeals from the school level. The committee will be appointed by the Superintendent or his/her designee as follows:
   a. Director of school library services
   b. Director of elementary, middle, or secondary education, as appropriate
   c. Curriculum coordinator specializing in reading from the appropriate level
   d. District-level library services staff
   e. School librarian from the appropriate level
   f. Other district-level instructional directors
   g. A student from the level in which the challenged material resides (middle or high school level only)

14. The organization of the District-Level Reconsideration Committee will be as follows:
   a. Policy, committee guidelines, and procedures should be reviewed at each meeting.
   b. The chairperson will be the school library coordinator (or other appropriate central office supervisor of school libraries). The secretary of the committee will be elected at each meeting.
   c. The chairperson will be the spokesperson for the committee at all meetings and before the Board of Education when decisions are made.
   d. The secretary will record the minutes and decisions of the meetings.
   e. These should be filed with the chairperson, who will communicate decisions in writing to the superintendent. Meetings will be called at the discretion of the chairperson or when an appeal is requested by a complainant.

15. The procedures for the District-Level Reconsideration Committee will be as follows:
   a. The chairperson will call the meeting within 10 school days after the written appeal is filed with the superintendent.
b. The committee shall read and/or examine the challenged resource, read the written reconsideration form, and read copies of the professionally prepared reviews and list of awards provided by the school librarian on the committee. The chairperson should forward these materials to the committee members at least three days prior to the meeting. The procedures for these meetings are the same as those for the school-level meeting.

16. The procedures for an appeal to the Board of Education will be as follows:
   a. An appeal of the decision made by the District-Level Reconsideration Committee must be made in writing to the superintendent within 10 days of the system-level committee decision.
   b. A decision on the complaint will be made at the next regular meeting or special meeting within 30 days of the written request to the superintendent.
   c. The board reserves the right to use outside expertise if necessary to help in its decision making.
   d. The chairperson for the District-Level Reconsideration Committee will present the committee's decision to the board.
   e. The complainant or designee will present the petitioner's position.
   f. The board decision will be final, and the superintendent will implement the decision.
   g. Decisions on reconsidered materials will stand for five years before new requests for reconsideration of those items will be entertained.

Sample School Library Request for Reconsideration of Material Form

The school board of Mainstream County, U.S.A., has delegated the responsibility for selection and evaluation of library/educational resources to the school library professional staff/curriculum committee, and has established reconsideration procedures to address concerns about those resources. Completion of this form is the first step in those procedures. If you wish to request reconsideration of school or library resources, please return the completed form to the coordinator of library media resources (or principal).

Mainstream School District
1 Mainstream Plaza
Anytown, State Zip

Date __________________________________________________________
Name __________________________________________________________
Address _________________________________________________________
City ____________________________ State/Zip _______________________
Phone __________________________ Email __________________________

Do you represent self? ____ Or an organization? ____ Name of Organization __________________________

1. Resource on which you are commenting:
   ___ Book (e-book) ___ Movie ___ Magazine ___ Database
   ___ Audio Recording ___ Digital Resource ___ Textbook ___ App
   ___ Newspaper ___ Game ___ Streaming Media ___ Other

Title __________________________________________________________
Author/Producer _________________________________________________

Is the resource part of the curriculum, library collection, or other? __________________________
2. What brought this resource to your attention?
___________________________________________________________

3. Have you examined the entire resource? If not, what sections did you review?
___________________________________________________________

4. What concerns you about the resource?
___________________________________________________________

5. Are there resource(s) you suggest to provide additional information and/or other viewpoints on this topic?
___________________________________________________________

6. What action are you requesting the committee consider?
___________________________________________________________

Sample Letter to Complainant

When an individual expresses an informal or verbal concern about a library resource and is not satisfied with the subsequent discussion with library and/or school staff, she or he may indicate a desire to formally challenge the resource in question. At that time, the form for reconsideration of the work as well as a copy of the selection and reconsideration policy may be given directly to the complainant or sent to the concerned individual after the conversation.

School Library Sample Letter to Person Requesting Reconsideration

Dear _____:

We appreciate your concern over the use of ____________________ in our school district. The district has a policy for selecting materials, but realizes that not everyone will agree with every selection made.

To help you understand the selection process, we are sending copies of the district's:

1. Instructional goals and objectives
2. Materials Selection Policy statement
3. Procedure for Handling Formal Complaints
4. Request for Reconsideration of Material form

If you are still concerned after you review this material, please complete the enclosed Request for Reconsideration of Material form and return it to me. You may be assured of prompt attention to your request. If I have not heard from you within two weeks, we will assume you no longer wish to file a formal complaint.

Sincerely,

_______________________
Principal

Date

Reconsideration Committees

Guidelines

Under the best professional standards, reconsideration policies ask those charged with reviewing a challenged book or other resource to set aside their personal beliefs and evaluate the work in light of
the objective standards outlined in the library’s materials selection policy. Listed below are some best practices for Reconsideration Committee members:

- Bear in mind the principles of the freedom to read and base your decision on these broad principles rather than in defense of individual materials. Based in the First Amendment, the freedom to read is essential to our democracy.
- Read or view all materials referred to you including the full text of the material in question, available reviews, and notices of awards, if applicable.
- Review the library mission statement, materials selection and reconsideration policies, and professional guides such as the Intellectual Freedom Manual.
- The general acceptance of the materials should be checked by consulting standard evaluation aids and your institution’s selection policies.
- Challenged materials should not be removed from the collection while under reconsideration.
- Passages or parts of the work in question should not be pulled out of context. The values and faults should be weighed against each other and the opinions based on the materials as a whole.
- In order to prevent a tie vote, the library director (public and academic libraries) or principal (school libraries) should recruit an odd number of members for the committee.
- While it may be prudent to state what area/role a committee member represents in the makeup of the committee (ie, teacher, librarian, community member, administration, parent, etc), the personal identification of each member should remain anonymous to protect the objectivity of the deliberation.
- The reconsideration committee meeting may be closed depending on state law and local practice. While public comments may be useful, these comments should be directed to the principal, director or governing body.
- The committee’s recommendation is to be an objective evaluation of the material within the scope of a library’s selection policy.
- The committee’s report, presenting both majority and minority opinions, should be presented to the governing body or administrator, as directed in the reconsideration process, with a recommendation to retain the material in its original location, to relocate the material, or to remove the material. The report may differ depending on the type of resource that is being challenged, such as library material, display, curriculum, reading list etc.
- Establish a procedure for communicating the committee’s recommendation to the governing body or administrator and to the person who made the formal reconsideration request. For example, the committee communicates its decision to the director or principal, who then communicates the decision to the person who make the challenge as well as to the institution’s governing board.

Sample Reconsideration Committee Report

[PDF]

Title _______________________________________________________

Author/Producer _____________________________________________

Has every member of the committee read the material entirely? If not, why?

Resources consulted: (include policies, articles, reviews etc.)
Reconsideration committee recommends:

__________________________________________________________________________

Justification and comments: (include majority and minority positions)

__________________________________________________________________________

Signatures of Reconsideration Committee Members:

__________________________________________________________________________

Date:

__________________________________________________________________________

Note: This report is forwarded to:

__________________________________________________________________________

Intellectual Freedom Core Documents

First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

[more]

Library Bill of Rights and Interpretations

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

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.

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.

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

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

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

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.

[more]

Code of Ethics of the American Library Association

As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professionals providing information services, library trustees and library staffs.
Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict. The American Library Association Code of Ethics states the values to which we are committed, and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in this changing information environment.

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations. The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.

I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.

II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.

IV. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.

V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.

VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.

VII. 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.

VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

[more]

Freedom to Read Statement

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to counter threats to safety or national security, as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free
press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority.

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education
by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous.

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

7. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing
and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

[more]

**Challenge Support and Reporting Censorship**

[Reporting censorship](#) to ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) raises awareness of the harms of censorship. OIF tracks attempts to remove or restrict books across the country. By reporting censorship incidents, librarians help identify trends in censorship cases and document responses and solutions to censorship. Since 1990, OIF has maintained a database on challenged materials. ALA collects information from two sources: media reports and reports submitted by individuals.

Libraries are a forum for information and ideas equitably and without restricted access. OIF’s first priority is to make sure that all librarians, educators, and users know this. Our second priority is to fight any attempts to limit or remove access. Reporting censorship helps OIF provide better information and support to librarians and teachers facing intellectual freedom and access challenges.

Anyone may call ALA with questions or to report a challenge to library or classroom resources via the online challenge reporting form. A person does not have to be a member of ALA or a librarian. As a professional association designed to support librarians, we follow the lead of the people with whom we are working. In some situations, publicly aligning with outside advocates may not be the best course of action for a librarian in a tenuous environment. We will never reveal who contacts our office or why without the individual’s permission.

**Bibliography of Additional Resources**


