



Intellectual Freedom – Quick Tips for Indiana Libraries

Indiana Library Federation (ILF) can help connect you with members of the larger library community. ILF has members from all types of libraries in all types of communities, which are reflected in their libraries' collection development policy or donation policy or catalogue. Being part of a controversy related to a book or materials challenge, especially if personal views are conflicted, can be stressful and isolating. There is support in Indiana and with your colleagues and with ALA.

Indiana Library Federation stands by 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. 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.

Policies

Libraries and school districts maintain a number of policies that will guide how library staff and administrators decide whether and how to include books and materials, as well as how to respond to questions and concerns. To serve entire communities, librarians seek materials on a broad range of subject matter that reflect diverse experiences according to policies. Librarians don't select materials based on their personal beliefs. Policies include:

- **A Collection Development policy** provides the guidelines for acquisition, weeding and preservation of a library's collection, including qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate materials for inclusion, based on the library's purpose, goals and principles of intellectual freedom. A library's collection development policy will vary with the type of library, its mission and community served. For example, a school library will often focus on curricular and other support materials that are appropriate for reading levels. A special library may focus on a specific subject area.
- **A Reconsideration or Challenge policy** provides a process for patrons or students, parents, administrators and stakeholders to request a change in how a part of the collection or program is included in the collection or delivered in the community.
- **A Donation policy** outlines whether and how donations of print, electronic and other items may be accepted or rejected, receipted or repurposed, and the rationale for such.

Understand the difference between “selection” and “censorship” – Lester Asheim offered an article [“Not Censorship But Selection”](#) how librarians must be intentional to uphold library values to ensure access to materials without censoring under the cover of “selection.”

Report a challenge, even if resolved positively, to the American Library Association (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom, at <http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report>.

Talk through your questions with a colleague. We understand that many librarians—especially school, academic and special librarians—may feel burdened by being the only librarian in their library. Contact the ILF office to be connected with a librarian from a similarly situated type of library/community. The ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom is also available by phone.

Librarians and Social Media. Consider your library's personnel policies and social media policies. Most policies require separation of personal opinion from library or school position. Remember that posts are permanent, even if you have deleted them. Consult your local policy.

Indiana Library Federation leads, educates and advocates to advance library services for the benefit of Indiana residents.

Responding to questions.

First, consider questions and the questioners carefully. If the question is from a board member or administrator, are they knowledgeable about your policies? If a member of the media, do you know the journalist or media source? You don't have to answer the question immediately. Take time to write your response carefully and respond in a timely manner by your library or school policy.

Second, frame the conversation positively around the professional skills of the librarians. Rather than focus on the book/resource in question, focus on how librarians (or library workers) strive to help each child and their family find print and digital resources that support their interests and values.

Responding verbally

- Take a deep breath. Slow down.
- Speak in a slow, softer voice, especially if you are talking with someone who is emotional, loud or elevated.
- Be prepared; determine your key messages in advance.
- Practice a few statements out loud, in your own words.
- Keep it short and simple.

Below is a sample response.

[LIBRARY NAME] stands by 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. [LIBRARY NAME] includes print and digital materials in its collection based on a collection development policy as approved by our [BOARD OF TRUSTEES/SCHOOL BOARD/(AUTHORITY NAME or TYPE)] on [DATE]. Donated materials are covered in that same policy/our donated materials policy.

If included in the collection, add this sentence at the end: *[BOOK TITLE/RESOURCE] meets the criteria in the policy and is included in the collection. It may be found [LOCATION].*

If not included in collection, add this sentence at the end, *[BOOK TITLE/RESOURCE] does not meet the criteria in the policy and is not included in the collection.*

If needed in a school or public children's setting: *Materials include subjects intended for many grade and maturity levels and reflect varying viewpoints and philosophies. A parent is a child's most important adviser in choosing materials which meet his or her needs.*

Then add something affirming: *Libraries have a responsibility to provide information for a wide variety of users. Not every book in every collection will work for every reader but librarians are skilled at helping each person find the books that are right for them. We appreciate the support of our community to uphold all our residents' rights to read and have access to information.*

For assistance with any of the questions above, do not hesitate to contact the ILF office or the members of the ILF Board or appropriate committees. Visit www.ilfonline.org for more information.

Message Tips

Empathize - *We, too, want to keep children safe. That is why we teach internet safety and digital citizenship.*

Stick to what you know - *I am not an expert in that area. Librarians are good at finding information. Let me put you in touch with.../take your info...*

Pivot to the key message

– *That's a great question.* Find a bridge to a key message.

– *The most important thing to remember is....*

Appreciate – *Thank you for your concern.*

Responding to a Challenge – ALA offers many resources for responding to challenges with definitions, conducting a hearing, working with the media etc. <http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport>.