

## Montana State Library

# SERVICES TO LIBRARIES

## Trustee Manual

### Collection Management Policy

The selection of library materials is an essential process that is strongly related to intellectual freedom. To be prepared to meet challenges to this freedom, every local library needs to have a written collection management policy that has been adopted by the Board. The library's policy should clearly state that the basic goal of the library is to offer access to its collections and services to all members of the community. In addition, it should state that the intent of a public library is to circulate all legally protected materials that patrons require or desire, even though some officials or private citizens may not approve of them. When a censorship attempt occurs, don't defend the material; defend the right to read.

The following steps should be considered by every public library:

### Handling Complaints

If your library collection provides access to a wide range of materials, includes many points of view, and responds to requests from patrons, you are guaranteed to receive complaints. Most complaints about the library's collection can be resolved by making sure that individuals who question materials receive a copy of the library's policy. But, sometimes a person objects so strongly, they may take their complaint to the media or local government officials.

If a library faces a challenge to materials, as a trustee you should:

Officially adopt and support the American Library Association's Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read Statement.

Maintain a collection management policy. It should be in written form and approved by the Board. The policy should apply to all library materials equally (print, electronic, Internet).

Maintain a clearly defined process for handling complaints. Complaints should be filed in writing and the complainant properly identified. (See the sample Request for Reconsideration of Library Resources form). The process should determine who will review the challenged materials, how the review will be handled, who will respond to the complaint and how quickly, and what appeal process is available to the person lodging the complaint. The established process should be followed whether the complaint originates internally or externally.

Provide regular in-service training so if there is a challenge to library materials, both the Board and staff are aware of the contents of the collection management policy and the procedures for handling complaints.

Maintain lines of communication with civic, religious, educational, and political bodies of the community and emphasize the library's selection process and intellectual freedom principles in presentations to these groups and through newspaper articles and radio and television programs.

Be aware of local, municipal and state legislation relevant to intellectual freedom and First Amendment rights.

Follow all established policies and procedures.

Remember your responsibility to speak your mind and argue for your point of view within the forum of the Board, but to support the decision of the majority once it has been made. If you disagree, do not speak out publicly. If you cannot be silent, it is best to resign from the Board before making your opposition public.

Defend the selection policy that tries to satisfy many tastes and interests.

Be sensitive and fair and react in a responsible manner.

Take into consideration the rights of the whole community, which you represent.

Once a complaint has been filed, the library can contact Montana State Library for guidance and support. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom also has information and resources to assist at any stage of a challenge.

## Children's Rights

In Montana, minors have the same fundamental rights as adults unless otherwise prohibited. Those rights include the freedom of speech and the right to know. Because Montana law does not restrict a minor's use of the library, children have the right to use the library without the permission of a parent.

Although libraries cannot require a parental signature before loaning minors material, they can require that a parent sign a statement of financial liability before their child receives a library card. Montana law says that a minor may enter into a contract, such as agreeing to return library materials, but it also states that a minor can renounce the contract. A statement of liability protects the library's resources by having parents assume the financial liability for overdue or lost materials loaned to their children.

In addition to signing the statement of liability, the library can also require that parents verify their child's name, address and telephone number before a library card is issued.

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