Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Library-initiated programs support the mission of the library by providing users with additional opportunities for accessing information, education, and recreation. Article I of the Library Bill of Rights states, "Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves."

Library-initiated programs utilize library staff expertise about community interests, collections, services, and facilities to provide access to information and information resources. Library-initiated programs introduce users and potential users to library resources and the library's role as a facilitator of information access. The library may participate in cooperative or joint programs with other agencies, organizations, institutions, or individuals to facilitate information access in the community the library serves.

Library-initiated programs include, but are not limited to, lectures, community forums, performing and visual arts, participatory workshops, technology programming, creative learning programming, wellness programs, storytimes, continuing education, fairs and conventions, book clubs, discussion groups, demonstrations, displays, and presentations for social, cultural, educational, or entertainment purposes. Library-initiated programs may take place on-site at the library, offsite in other locations, or online and may be delivered by library staff, library volunteers, or library partners.

Libraries should not discriminate against individuals with disabilities and shall ensure they have equal access to library resources. Library-initiated programs should comply with all applicable laws, including the standards and requirements of ADA and state or local disability accessibility guidelines. If a program is held in a location not controlled by the library, the library should assure that the space is accessible to all library users. If users overflow designated event areas during library events, libraries should protect accessible public spaces (i.e., ramps, pathways, and emergency exit routes) to ensure access and safety for everyone. Reasonable accommodations should also be made to have interpretation or real-time captioning for the deaf or hard-of-hearing at library-
initiated programs when needed or requested by library users.

As stated in “Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights,” “Socially excluded, marginalized and underrepresented people, not just the mainstream majority, should be able to see themselves reflected in the resources and programs that libraries offer.” Libraries should actively seek to include a variety of programming options representing diversity of genres, formats, ideas, and expressions with a multitude of viewpoints and cultural perspectives that reflect the diversity in our communities. Library-initiated programs that cross language and cultural barriers introduce underserved populations to the library’s resources and provide access to information. Libraries serving multilingual or multicultural communities should make efforts to accommodate the information needs of those who speak and read languages other than English.

Libraries should have a policy guiding the development and implementation of programs, similar to material selection and building use policies, which has been approved by their policy-making body after consultation with legal counsel. These guidelines should set forth the library’s commitment to free and open access to information and ideas for all users. Article II of the Library Bill of Rights states, “Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.” Likewise, programs should not be canceled because of the ideas or topics of the program or the views expressed by the participants or speakers. Library sponsorship of a program does not constitute an endorsement of the program content or the views expressed by the participants or speakers, any more than the purchase of material for the library collection constitutes an endorsement of the material content or its creator’s views. Libraries should vigorously defend the First Amendment right of speakers and participants to express themselves. Concerns, questions, or complaints about library-initiated programs are handled according to the same written policy and procedures that govern reconsiderations of other library resources.

Article V of the Library Bill of Rights states, “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.” The “right to use a library” encompasses all the resources the library offers, including the right to attend library-initiated programs. Libraries create programs for an intended age group or audience based on educational suitability and audience interest; however, restrictions on participation based solely on the gender, chronological age or educational level of users violates this right and should be enforced only when it would adversely impact the safety of the participants. Parents and guardians may restrict their own children’s access to library programs, but no person or organization can interfere in others’ access.
and participation.

Libraries should not deny access to library-initiated programs if patrons owe the library for overdue fines or other fees, nor should program attendees be required to share their personal information in order to attend a library program. Any collection of program participants’ personal information should be on an opt-in basis only. If libraries charge program participants for supplies used, they should make every effort to reduce economic barriers to participation.
