Managing Challenges and Controversies

DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
OFFICE FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM
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Program and Display Challenges Happen….

Religion

- Darby, MT "Perspectives on Islam"
- Evanston, IL "Muslim Journeys"
- Delray Beach, FL: "Jews of Florida"

LGBTQIA+ Programming and Materials

- Haverford, PA Drag Queen Story Hour
- Evansville, IN Drag Queen Story Hour
- Delaware Co. OH Drag 101
- Rumford, ME LGBTQIA+ Book Display

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Pushback and Difficult Conversations

- Political, Personal, or Cultural Pushback
- Organized Social Media Campaigns
- Threats to Library Funding
- Threats to Staff and Board Autonomy
- Withdrawal of Support
- Targeted State or Local Legislation
- Threats of Harm or Violence

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Successfully Navigating Challenges and Controversy

Shared commitment to the library's mission and role in the community

Established relationships of trust with community groups, agencies, elected officials

Ongoing outreach to know and understand the community

Ability to articulate the library's role as a non-partisan source of information and education for the benefit of all in the community

Strong policies that support of the library's mission, core values, and staff

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What to do

- Policies and Procedures
- Staff Training
- Trustee Training
- Elected Officials Messaging
- Community Messaging

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Core Values: What Libraries Stand For

- Welcoming and Inclusive Space for All
- Resources and Collections Reflecting the Diversity of the Community
- Equal and Equitable Access to Information
- Care for the Community
- Commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Meeting the Needs of Marginalized Users
- Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Belief
- Respect for Others' Opinions

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User Rights, Programming, and the Law

- For purposes of First Amendment, the public library is a designated public forum open to the public for access to information and services provided by the library.
- BUT …library users only have rights consistent with the nature of the public library, that is, as a designated forum for access to information
- Libraries are not a public forum for other expressive activities, unless specifically authorized by the library.
- Libraries can establish rules governing behavior that are non-discriminatory and reasonably related to library use.
- Libraries may regulate non-expressive activity designed to promote safety or efficient access to materials, resources, and library spaces.
- Publicly funded libraries generally have broad discretion to manage their collections and programming.

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Review or Develop Effective Policies

- Programming & Exhibits Policy
- Reconsideration Policy (Program)
- Behavior Policy or Code of Conduct
- Meeting Room and Spaces Policy
- Social Media Policy

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Program and Exhibits Policy

- A “collection development” policy for programs
- How programs are selected
- Community partners- how chosen, responsibilities
- Statement of Intellectual Freedom
- Disclaimer / Non-Endorsement
- Separate Reconsideration Policy for programs

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Program and Exhibits Policy

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The Library's goal in programming is to connect members of our community with a wide variety of ideas and perspectives.

The Library is not obligated to represent multiple and/or opposing viewpoints within any one program or series. The Library welcomes the opportunity for other viewpoints to be represented in a separate program or series.

Presentation of a program does not constitute the Library's endorsement of the content or views expressed by participants.

- Dubuque County Library District
- Highland Park Public Library
- Kalamazoo Public Library
- Ames Public Library

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Statement of Concern: Managing Challenges

Establishes guidelines and procedure addressing concerns about library resources that assure deliberation and due process

- Who can challenge
  - Library Card Holders
  - Residents of Service Area
- Who Decides
  - Review committee
  - Board appeal
- How they can challenge
  - Written statement of concern
  - Opportunity to speak in public hearing
- Avoiding serial or nuisance challenges
  - Limits on number of challenges (per person and per program)
  - Finality - decision stands for a number of years
  - After revision of program & exhibits policy (new criteria)

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Patron Behavior Policy

Describes expectations and rules applicable to those using and visiting the library, including sanctions

Content neutral, time, place, and manner rules for library use applied without discrimination

Interference with safe or efficient access to materials or resources

Harassment of staff or other users

Criminal activity – vandalism, damage, other violations of law (and when to call police)

Special issues: Photography, filming, First Amendment audits

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Policy Resources

Intellectual Freedom Manual, Tenth Edition (Checklists, Articles on Law & Policy) http://www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=11353

Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/libraryinitiated

Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/meetingrooms

Advocating for Intellectual Freedom: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/advocating-intellectual-freedom

Social Media Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries
https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/socialmediaguidelines

Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit
https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit

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Staff & Trustee Training

Staff & Trustee Training

- Intellectual Freedom and Privacy basics
- Applicable laws and library policies
- Programs Policies, Spokesperson Procedures
  - "One voice" or referral to designated spokesperson
- Role of Staff vs the role of trustees
- Role-playing scenarios
- Refresher when circumstances dictate (New exhibit or program)

Issues to watch for:

- Silent Censorship
- Differences in interpretation of policy, ethics, or sense of responsibility
- Trustees who do not understand or disagree with policy and professional ethics

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Outreach and Messaging

Elected Officials

- Establish a relationship and inform them about policy & procedure – don't wait until there is a challenge
- Keep them informed about programs and services
- Stress that you are serving *all* their constituents

Community Outreach

- Be proactive in sharing the good news of the library's mission, services, and programs
- Develop Media Management plans, including crisis communications
- Speak with one voice – have a designated spokesperson

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Outreach, Messaging and Response Resources

- How to Respond to Challenges and Concerns about Library Policy https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/respond
- Responding to and Preparing for Controversial Programs and Speakers Q&A https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/controversialprogramsqa
- Preparing for Program Challenges at your Public Library (ALA Webinar) https://programminglibrarian.org/learn/preparing-program-challenges-your-public-library
- What Happened in Kansas City: Free Speech, Library Programs and the Law https://programminglibrarian.org/learn/what-happened-kansas-city-free-speech-library-programs-and-law
- Perspectives on Islam in Montana | American Libraries Magazine https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/04/15/perspectives-islam-montana/
- Crisis Communication for Libraries |Reaching Across Illinois Library System (Webinar) https://railslibraries.org/education/archives/101143
- Crisis Communications Guide | ALA https://www.ala.org/advocacy/crisis-communications-guide

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Hate Speech

- In the United States, hateful speech is not illegal and is protected under the 1st Amendment. But…
- Libraries can develop policies to protect library users and staff from harassment and ensure fair and equal access for all.
- Libraries can support free speech and equitable access to information while amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and communities

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Safety Planning

- Make predictions about the types of hateful or unsafe behavior that your staff might encounter.
- Hold regular staff, board, and volunteer trainings on safety and hateful behavior response. Empower staff internally and externally.
- Partner with local authorities and community organizations that specialize in crisis communications, harassment, and mental health.
- Consult with law enforcement when necessary & establish protocols

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Safety Resources

- Hateful Conduct in Libraries https://www.ala.org/advocacy/hatefulconduct
  - Special Considerations & Resources: https://www.ala.org/advocacy/hatefulconduct/considerations_resources
- Safe Library Programs Planning & Safety Support (PDF) https://bit.ly/4dJqQXq (Urban Librarians Unite)
- Libraries Respond: Cyberbullying and Doxxing: https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/librariesrespond/cyberbullying-doxxing
- Social Media Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/socialmediaguidelines
- Self Care Strategies https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/odlos-blog/self-care-strategies
- Online Harassment Field Manual | PEN America https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/

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Successfully Navigating Challenges and Controversy

- Don't fear controversy
- Prepare and follow your policies
- Prepare messaging and talking points and stick with them
- Ensure that there is emotional support for staff, board members, and yourself
- Don't hesitate to call on allies and professional networks

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Sources of Support

- ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom
- US Holocaust Memorial Museum
- ALA Public Programs Office
- ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services (ODLOS)
- ALA Office for State and Local Advocacy
- Local and regional professional networks
- Allied advocacy and civic organizations

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Questions, Advice & Assistance

ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom

oif@ala.org

(Email works best these days!)

800-545-2433 ext. 4221

http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report
http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport

Report Censorship

Challenge Support

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Thanks!

dstone@ala.org
Office for Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association
225 N. Michigan Avenue Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60615
312-280-04224

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