

Ensuring eBooks for All through America's Libraries

Millions of people every week explore and read new and favorite books at local libraries across the country. Digital discovery of authors and books through libraries remains at an all-time high, as more library systems nationwide saw their communities borrow more than one million eBooks and audiobooks this past year. But today major publishers are threatening Americans' right to read what and how they choose by restricting access to eBooks through our nation's libraries. These unfair policies particularly harm people who most depend on libraries, particularly those with disabilities or with low incomes. Lawmakers must restore equitable library lending rights to ensure access to our nation's cultural heritage.

The Challenge

With physical copies, libraries purchase (often at a discount from publishers) and lend materials without restriction. Businesses that sell these materials have profited as libraries buy and promote a wide range of books and authors. Likewise, libraries benefit from a stable collection at an affordable price.

With digital materials, there are areas in the marketplace that are failing libraries and the communities they serve. In November 2019, Macmillan Publishers restricted libraries (of any size) to a single copy of new eBook titles for eight weeks. Amazon – the world's fifth-largest publisher of eBooks – refuses to sell any eBooks to libraries. When they can purchase eBook access, libraries pay up to five times more than individuals and only have access to the titles for two years or a limited number of circulations before the license expires. Streaming licenses for audiovisual content also are typically limited to personal use and do not permit library lending or preservation.

The only way to ensure equitable access and availability of original digital content from publishers like Macmillan and Amazon, as well as streaming services like Netflix or Spotify, to generations of researchers, learners, and artists is for libraries to have the right to lend and preserve.

The Opportunity

Libraries will pay a fair price for fair services. Libraries have spent over \$40 billion in the past 10 years acquiring eBooks and other digital content that enables 24/7 access through library websites and apps. These investments improve access for people who are home-bound, physically disabled, or lack easy access to a physical library. eBooks become large-print books with a few clicks, and most eBook readers offer fonts and line spacing that make reading easier for people with dyslexia.

Equitable access to information and creative works is central to the mission of libraries and essential for readers and learners. The American Library Association urges lawmakers to curb unfair practices.

- All published works must be available for libraries to purchase and lend when they are available in the consumer market.
- Access to and use of eBooks must equitably balance the rights and privileges of readers, authors, and publishers.
- Digital content must be accessible to all people, regardless of physical or reading disabilities.
- Library patrons must be able to access digital content on the device of their choosing.
- Reading records must remain private in the digital age.