

UNDERSTANDING LIBRARY VALUES

Libraries operate according to a set of principles articulated by the ALA Core Values of Librarianship. This resource is to help our board members better understand library core values so that they may better support the work of librarians. The core values are reproduced below in italics, with our own interpretation of them below the italic text.

ACCESS

Access provides opportunities for everyone in the community to obtain library resources and services with minimal disruption. Library workers create systems that ensure members of their community can freely access the information they need for learning, growth, and empowerment regardless of technology, format, or delivery methods.

This core value motivates library workers to create welcoming libraries, support the accessibility needs of patrons such as magnification tools and accessible buildings, offer evening and weekend open hours, and provide a diverse array of materials, programs, and services. This core value is why many library workers oppose things like late fines for overdue materials, labeling of LGBTQ material (labeling may be a deterrent to access because it has the possibility to “out” someone), and codes of conduct which are overly punitive.

EQUITY

Library workers play a crucial role in fostering equity by actively working to dismantle barriers and create spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and beneficial for all. This is accomplished by recognizing and addressing systemic barriers, biases, and inequalities to create inclusive library environments where everyone can benefit from the library's offerings and services.

This core value is related to the value of access, but more explicitly recognizing the systemic injustices that create barriers to accessibility. This core value reminds us to lift up those patrons who have been excluded in society, and create library services that support them directly. At their best, libraries offer diverse collections relevant to all walks of life, and are particularly supportive of the information needs of marginalized people.



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A resource for library board members

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND PRIVACY

Intellectual freedom empowers people to think for themselves and to make informed decisions while respecting each individual's dignity and independence. Library workers encourage people to cultivate curiosity and form ideas by questioning the world and accessing information from diverse viewpoints and formats without restrictions or censorship. The right to privacy is a crucial safeguard to this freedom, ensuring everyone has the right to develop their thoughts and opinions free of surveillance.

When libraries are under attack, intellectual freedom is seriously threatened. Library workers and our boards must therefore be ready to defend those materials, services, and programs most threatened - those related to LGBTQ, Black, Brown, and immigrant experiences, climate change, and other ideas deemed threatening to the vocal minority who wish to dismantle libraries.

We must also recognize that privacy is essential for intellectual freedom - without privacy, there can be chilling effects on speech and expression; people will self-censor if they fear they are being watched. The library should work to protect the privacy of patrons within the library, and offer resources and programming to support their privacy outside of the library.

PUBLIC GOOD

Public good is working to improve society and protect the rights to education, literacy, and intellectual freedom. Libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies. Library workers provide the highest service levels to create informed, connected, educated, and empowered communities.

In this environment of hate against LGBTQ and BIPOC community members, we have a social responsibility to stand up for them and ensure that our libraries are welcoming to all marginalized people. Libraries are also a haven for the unhoused people in our communities; we should take care that our policies are not punitive towards those carrying large bags, needing to use the library space all day, sleeping, and so on.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability means making choices that are good for the environment, make sense economically, and treat everyone equitably. Sustainable choices preserve physical and digital resources and keep services useful now and into the future. By supporting climate resiliency, library workers create thriving communities and care for our common good for a better tomorrow.

The sustainability of the library is being threatened in this environment of extreme hostility. Many of the organizations and individual actors who are attempting to ban books and programming are also working to defund libraries or wrest control from professional librarians. How we choose to respond in this moment will determine whether libraries will exist in the future.



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