# Collection Development at the Fairfax County Public Library

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Collection Development at the Fairfax County Public Library

The mission of the Fairfax County Public Library is to provide and encourage the use of library resources and services where the Fairfax County Public Library can best meet the evolving educational, recreational, and informational needs of all the residents of Fairfax County, and Fairfax City, thus enhancing individual and community life.

To support this mission, library materials are selected, organized, and made accessible in order to anticipate and meet the diverse needs of the Fairfax County and City citizens.

Policy on Library Materials Selection and Censorship

The Selection Policy of the Fairfax County Public Library Board of Trustees has established that:

1. The library shall develop collections of merit and significance, whether acquired by purchase or gift. Each item of material shall be considered in terms of its value to the collection and the audience for whom it is intended. Reading and language abilities of the citizens will be considered.

2. Materials to be evaluated shall include a variety of books for young people and adults, in hardcover and paperback editions; financial services; database services; large print books; periodicals; newspapers; pamphlets; recordings; video cassettes; films; tapes; microforms; maps; music scores; framed art; sculpture; and the equipment needed for all borrowers, including individuals with disabilities, to use the materials.

3. Materials shall be evaluated according to objective standards. Flexibility, open-mindedness and responsiveness are required in the evaluation process. Consideration shall be given to expanding knowledge, changing social values, technological advantages, and cultural differences where appropriate. As growth and change occur in these areas, the Library shall reevaluate materials which were not acquired.

4. Some materials may be judged primarily in terms of artistic merit, scholarship or their value as human documents; others will be selected to satisfy recreational and entertainment needs.

5. Different viewpoints on controversial issues will be acquired, including those which may have unpopular or unorthodox positions. The Library recognizes that those materials which offend, shock or bore one reader may be considered pleasing, meaningful, or significant by another.

6. To avoid unnecessary duplication, consideration will be given to materials available to the public through other area libraries and community agencies.

7. All collections will be widely accessible to all borrowers, regardless of their location, through extensive interlibrary and intra-library loan services and through the daily delivery service.

8. Recognizing that a materials selection policy can result in complaints from the public at large who may not understand the reasons why certain items have been included in the collection, the Library shall develop procedures for reconsideration of the item in question. Any patron has the right to question the purchase of an item for the library collection.

9. The Library Board of Trustees supports the American Library Association’s (ALA) Bill of Rights, ALA’s Freedom to Read Statement, ALA’s Library Rights for Adults, and ALA’s Free Access to Libraries for Minors.
Responsibility for the Selection of Library Materials

The authority and responsibility for the selection of library materials is delegated to the Library Director and, under his/her direction, to the professional staff who are qualified for this activity by reason of education, training, and experience. Suggestions from staff members (other than those officially assigned the selection responsibility) and from library users are encouraged and seriously considered in the selection process.

Goals of Selection

The Fairfax County Public Library selects, makes available, and promotes the use of library materials, whatever the format, which:

1. Enrich and support the educational, recreational, and informational needs of the users, taking into consideration their varied interests, abilities, and learning styles.

2. Represent differing viewpoints on a subject.

3. Reflect the problems, aspirations, attitudes, and ideals of a pluralistic society.

4. Support business, cultural, recreational, and civic activities in the community.

5. Stimulate self-understanding and growth.

6. Enhance job-related knowledge and skills.

7. Increase knowledge of and participation in the affairs of the community, the country, and the world.

8. Are appropriate to the level of the user.

The collections for young people are aimed at meeting the diverse recreational, cultural, and informational needs of that segment of the population from infancy through adolescence. Materials are included to provide enjoyment, stretch the imagination, cultivate a love of books and reading, stimulate creative abilities, supplement study, and provide an awareness of the broad spectrum of moral and social values. Materials are selected which vary in format, content, and level to meet wide-ranging interests and demands, to help young people understand their own development, and to prepare them for informed participation in society.

Criteria for Selection

The evaluation of materials is characterized by flexibility, open-mindedness, and a responsiveness to the changing needs of the citizens of Fairfax County and City. These changing needs require that materials be evaluated initially and on a continuing basis. As a result, material not recommended for purchase originally, may in fact, be purchased at a later date. The converse, that is materials may still be considered unsuitable or unnecessary for the collection, is also possible.

Materials are evaluated as a whole and not on the basis of a particular section or section. A work will not be excluded from the Library’s collection, because it presents an aspect of life honestly or because of frankness of expression.

While a single standard cannot be applied to each potential item for selection, materials are judged by appropriate criteria. In some instances, these criteria include artistic merit, scholarship, or the value of the material to the informational needs of the community. In other instances, the criterion may be substantial demand.
To build a diversified collection, which supports the Library’s mission, the following objective criteria are used. These criteria apply to purchased and donated materials.

**General Criteria**

1. Availability and suitability of format.
2. Suitability of subject, style, and level for the intended audience.
3. Critics’ and staff’s reviews.
4. Reputation of the publisher or producer; authority and significance of the author, composer, film maker, etc.
5. Timeliness or permanence of the material.
6. Quality of writing, design, illustrations, or production.
7. Relevance to community needs.
8. Potential and/or known demand for the material.
9. Relative importance in comparison with existing materials in the collection on the same subject.
10. Availability and accessibility of the same material in the Metropolitan area.

**Specific Criteria for the Evaluation of Factual Works**

1. Recency and accuracy of the information presented.
2. Competence of author.
3. Objectivity.
5. Clarity of presentation.
6. Usability of arrangement.
7. Inclusion in standard bibliographies and indices.

**Specific Criteria for the Evaluation of Works Representing an Opinion**

1. Representation of a challenging, though extreme or minority, point of view.
2. Clarity and logic of presentation.
3. Usability of arrangement.
5. Degree and accomplishment of purpose.
6. Availability of materials on the subject.
Specific Criteria for the Evaluation of Works of the Imagination

1. Representation of an important movement, genre, trend, or culture.

2. Vitality and originality.

3. Artistic presentation and quality evidenced in the plot, setting, theme, characterization, point of view, and style.

4. Sustained interest and entertainment.

Withdrawal and Discarding of Library Materials

Materials are regularly withdrawn from the Library’s collection. They are withdrawn and discarded because:

1. They are out-of-date, that is, no longer timely or accurate.

2. They are so badly worn or damaged that they cannot be bound or mended.

3. It is cheaper to replace them.

4. They are once-popular materials no longer used.

5. Space considerations. (In this case, materials may be transferred from one Branch Library to another Branch Library.)

Materials, deemed lost or missing, are officially withdrawn from the record of Library holdings.

Replacement of Library Materials

A replacement is an item purchased to take the place of an identical title previously in the collection. It is the Library’s policy not to replace automatically all materials withdrawn because of loss, damage, or wear. The need for replacement in each case is judged by two factors:

Existence of adequate coverage of the subject, especially if more current material is available.

Demand for the specific title.

Gifts of Library Materials

Gifts of books and other materials are accepted with the understanding that they may be used or disposed of as the Library determines is appropriate. New titles acquired in this manner are subject to the basic standards of selection. Replacements and duplicate copies are added to the collection if needed. The cost of processing and the availability of shelving space are also factors in determining the acceptance of gifts. The Library does not provide evaluations of gifts for tax deductions or other purposes.

Materials Preservation

Certain materials of long-term value and/or usefulness may be preserved through binding, microforming, or some other technique.
Reconsideration of Library Materials

Procedures have been developed for the reconsideration of materials to assure that objections or complaints are handled in an attentive and consistent manner. Once an item has been accepted for purchase, based on the Selection Policy of the Library Board of Trustees and the criteria for selection, it will not be automatically removed upon request. (See reconsideration of library materials.)

Reconsideration of Library Materials - Fairfax County Public Library

The choice of library materials by users is an individual matter. While a person may reject materials for himself/herself, he/she cannot exercise censorship to restrict access to the materials by others.

Recognizing that a diversity of materials may result in some requests for reconsideration, the following procedures have been developed to assure that objections or complaints are handled in an attentive and consistent manner.

The person with the request for reconsideration should be referred immediately to the Branch Manager or the person in charge in the absence of the Branch Manager. The person in charge should explain to the user that selection are made in accordance with the Selection Policy of the Fairfax County Public Library’s Board of Trustees. If the user is not satisfied with the explanation received, he/she may ask for reconsideration in the following manner:

A. 1. A letter, stating the specifics of the objection or complaint, must be written to the Branch Manager. The Branch Manager is to respond in writing to the user, advising him/her that there will be reconsideration of the item after the user’s letter has been forwarded to the appropriate Materials Selection Coordinator. A copy of “Collection Development at the Fairfax County Public Library” should be included with the Branch Manager’s letter.

2. After receiving the original letter from the patron and a copy of the Branch Manager’s letter, the Coordinator will appoint a reviewing committee of three professional staff members to reconsider the item. The reviewers will be sent copies of the two letters and any reviews available.

3. The reviewers will put their recommendations in writing to the Coordinator.

4. The Coordinator will return the reviewers’ comments to the Branch Manager along with any other reviews available.

5. The Branch Manager will then write to the user regarding the committee’s recommended action, sending a copy of the letter to the Coordinator. The reviewers’ comments are to be held confidential by all concerned. Brief quotes, however, may be used in the Branch Manager’s letter to the user.

B. If the user desires further action, he/she may appeal to the Director of Libraries or to the Library Board of Trustees in writing.
Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.*

*Adopted by the Library Board 9/17/80 “...to the extent that it is legal and consistent with FCPL policies.”

American Library Association’s Freedom to Read Statement

REVISED STATEMENT

(The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, Richard Darling, chairman (Dean, School of Library Science, Columbia U), has approved a revised version of the Freedom to Read Statement, issued in conjunction with International Book Year 1972. The new statement, also approved by the ALA Council on January 28, 1972, appeared in the March issue of American Libraries, and because of its importance to all bookmen, is here printed in full, courtesy of ALA and AL’s editor, Gerald R. Shields).

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label “controversial” views, to distribute lists of “objectionable” books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to counter threats to safety or national security, as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be “protected” against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untired voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe
that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority. Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated. Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author. No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression. To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous. The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for
others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people’s freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information. It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

7. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a “bad” book is a good one, the answer to a “bad” idea is a good one. The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader’s purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

This statement was originally issued in May of 1953 by the Westchester Conference of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council, which in 1970 consolidated with the American Educational Publishers Institute to become the Association of American Publishers.

Library Rights of Adults - A Call for Action

In today's world of complexity and rapid change, every adult faces an unending series of difficult decisions. These decisions involve not only each person but also his family, his community, and the world beyond. In addition to meeting his responsibilities as a citizen, every adult also exists as a unique and valuable individual. As such he is entitled to the joy of personal fulfillment throughout his lifetime.

Libraries are committed to reach out and help each adult meet his responsibilities and achieve his personal goals. This promise can be made because libraries offer skilled staff, a wide range of materials, and access to many outside sources of information. Through his library, the adult can encounter the accumulated knowledge of the past, facts about the present, and ideas which will shape the future.

Excellent library service today is the right of every adult. This right will become a reality for all, however, only through the combined action of the adult and the librarian.

The Adult’s Rights

Every adult has the right to a library which seeks to understand both his needs and his wants and which uses every possible means to satisfy them. His library offers:

Wide Resources

Full and prompt access to all recorded fact, opinion, and creative effort in whatever physical form he feels is most useful to him.

The books, films, music and works of art he wants to see and hear, an opportunity to encounter new material and creative works of which he may be unaware.

A conveniently located library through which he can tap the resources of all libraries through its participation in regional and national information networks.

Skilled Staff

Personal assistance from a librarian who creates a welcoming atmosphere, who seeks to understand his needs (either expressed or unexpressed), and who has the knowledge and skills to select, locate, evaluate, and interpret materials for him.

Equal respect and the same high quality of service whether he is skilled or unskilled, sophisticated or naive, conservative or radical, serious or casual, knowledgeable or ignorant, practical or visionary.

Guidance from a librarian who seeks to help him use the library and who focuses attention on those materials which relate to current issues of vital concern.

Effective Service

A library organized for his benefit with up-to-date methods and technology and an effective publicity program whose messages reach him.

The Librarian’s Commitment

As librarians, we recognize the importance of service to and the depth and variety of their needs. No one library in isolation can possibly meet all those needs. It is important, therefore, for each library not only to formulate goals and services and establish priorities for its primary clientele but also to
work cooperatively with other libraries. Indeed it is essential that all libraries join and contribute to the emerging regional and national networks. These networks must include every library, whether it be public, academic, special, institutional, or a school library-instructional materials center which serves adults.

Cooperation, however, should not be limited to libraries. In each community the library must work with a wide range of agencies both in planning and in providing services.

* * * * * *

We are committed to assure the library rights of all adults through the provision of staff, services, and materials.

**Staff**

- Who welcome the user in a spirit of helpfulness and respect.

- Who understand the user and also the potential user, and communicate effectively with each on his own terms.

- Who evaluate all services from the user’s point of view.

- Who are flexible, able to modify conventional procedures, accept new ideas, improvise and experiment with new techniques.

- Who have time to provide personal assistance and the freedom to exercise independent judgment in the interest of the user.

- Who recognize and understand physical and emotional disabilities and the special needs for services which these disabilities may create.

- Who stimulate wide use of the library’s resources.

- Who are trained and experienced in work with adults, have an understanding of the behavioral and social sciences, and are alert to new technological developments.

- Who recognize the values of continuing education for themselves and their colleagues and who can train and inspire staff.

- Who understand the process of social change, recognize the role of the library in that process, and are as free as humanly possible from personal prejudice.

- Who can draw quickly on consultants from libraries or from other fields, either from subject areas or with skills in such areas as audiovisual materials, informational retrieval, research methods, remedial reading, and services to the handicapped.

- Who know the characteristics, resources, and needs of the total community.

- Who are actively involved in their communities and profession and can influence the development of facilities and programs.

**Services**

Protection of the adult’s right to read by provision and promotion of a wide range of materials selected by the staff without bias or censorship.

Loan of materials with liberal regulations at convenient times and places, whether direct from a library or bookmobile or by free delivery or mail to the adult’s home, school, place of business, or activity location.
Use of the best procedures and equipment which the new technology can provide in order to free staff to serve the public.

Easy access to all the local library’s information sources in person, by telephone, and through electronic media with orientation and instruction in library use.

Specialized reference and research services at central service points, where competent subject and media specialists are readily available for consultation.

Use of interlibrary loan or facsimile text to allow rapid access to all available materials, wherever they are located.

Provision of special materials and services for the handicapped, including easy access to library buildings and other facilities and, when required, free direct service to homes and institutions.

Participation with other agencies and community groups in cooperative planning for adults and in the provision of activities to stimulate and satisfy educational and cultural needs.

Use of the skills of the staff and all other library resources to present a broad range of educational and cultural activities, such as book and film programs, discussion groups, multimedia presentations, concerts, and exhibitions.

Provision of services to adult groups, including assistance in program-planning; help in the location and appraisal of materials; provision of speakers, exhibits for use outside the library and materials for loan in quantity when necessary; and offering of library space for meetings.

Vigorous, innovative action and imaginative publicity which effectively promote library service to all adults, both users and potential users.

**Materials**

Provisions, though systems of libraries and other information centers, of materials which, as far as possible, meet the informational needs of every adult.

Supplying of information and reference materials selectively at the local level and in increasing depth at resource centers in the information network to:

- Meet adult curricular and learning needs.

- Supply information on home and family life.

- Provide information on vocations, business, industry and labor, scientific and technological developments.

- Offer materials on fundamental political, social and economic questions and on local, national, and world affairs.

- Satisfy cultural and aesthetic interests in literature, the arts, philosophy and religion.

Providing at the local library a variety of materials to satisfy the prevalent tastes, needs, and reading and language abilities of adults in the community as well as a diversity of materials in recognition of changing and minority interests. These will include:

- A range of relevant, contemporary materials.

- Differing viewpoints on controversial issues, with all possible representation of unpopular or unorthodox positions.
• Materials to suit a variety of tastes, with recognition that those which offend, shock, or bore one adult may be considered meaningful or significant to another.

• A variety of materials for inspirational reading, literary and aesthetic enjoyment, and recreational reading, as well as for informational purposes.

• Books in hardcover and paperback editions, large-print books, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, recordings, films, tapes, microforms, maps, music scores, pictures, and the equipment needed for viewing films or microforms, for listening to records, or for aid in reading.

• Acquisition through cooperative programs and networks, of less frequently used, expensive and rare materials in all forms and of resources in depth in specific subject areas.

• Supplying of materials in such quantities as needed, with reproduction of copies when required and as consistent with federal copyright regulations.

• Encouraging the creation and publication of needed materials when they are not available for purchase.

The Adult Services Division of the American Library Association appeals to librarians to work, together creatively and cooperatively so that these library rights for adults will become not a goal for the future but a description of the present.

Adopted by the Adult Services Division and the Reference Services Division of the American Library Association, July, 1980.

Prepared by the Standards Development Committee of the Adult Services Division, American Library Association.

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Free Access to Libraries for Minors
An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Library policies and procedures that effectively deny minors equal and equitable access to all library resources available to other users violate the Library Bill of Rights. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users.

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” includes free access to, and unrestricted use of, all the services, materials, and facilities the library has to offer. Every restriction on access to, and use of, library resources, based solely on the chronological age, educational level, literacy skills, or legal emancipation of users violates Article V.

Libraries are charged with the mission of developing resources to meet the diverse information needs and interests of the communities they serve. Services, materials, and facilities that fulfill the needs
and interests of library users at different stages in their personal development are a necessary part of library resources. The needs and interests of each library user, and resources appropriate to meet those needs and interests, must be determined on an individual basis. Librarians cannot predict what resources will best fulfill the needs and interests of any individual user based on a single criterion such as chronological age, educational level, literacy skills, or legal emancipation.

Libraries should not limit the selection and development of library resources simply because minors will have access to them. Institutional self-censorship diminishes the credibility of the library in the community, and restricts access for all library users.

Children and young adults unquestionably possess First Amendment rights, including the right to receive information in the library. Constitutionally protected speech cannot be suppressed solely to protect children or young adults from ideas or images a legislative body believes to be unsuitable for them. Librarians and library governing bodies should not resort to age restrictions in an effort to avoid actual or anticipated objections, because only a court of law can determine whether material is not constitutionally protected.

The mission, goals, and objectives of libraries cannot authorize librarians or library governing bodies to assume, abrogate, or overrule the rights and responsibilities of parents. As “Libraries: An American Value” states, “We affirm the responsibility and the right of all parents and guardians to guide their own children’s use of the library and its resources and services.” Librarians and governing bodies should maintain that parents—and only parents—have the right and the responsibility to restrict the access of their children—and only their children—to library resources. Parents who do not want their children to have access to certain library services, materials, or facilities should so advise their children. Librarians and library governing bodies cannot assume the role of parents or the functions of parental authority in the private relationship between parent and child.

Lack of access to information can be harmful to minors. Librarians and library governing bodies have a public and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free, equal, and equitable access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, format, or amount of detail. This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults. Librarians and library governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors.

1See Erznoznik v. City of Jacksonville, 422 U.S. 205 (1975): “Speech that is neither obscene as to youths nor subject to some other legitimate proscription cannot be suppressed solely to protect the young from ideas or images that a legislative body thinks unsuitable [422 U.S. 205, 214] for them. In most circumstances, the values protected by the First Amendment are no less applicable when government seeks to control the flow of information to minors. See Tinker v. Des Moines School Dist., supra. Cf. West Virginia Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette, 319 U.S. 624 (1943)."

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