

MIDLOTHIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTION MANAGEMENT POLICY

I. PURPOSE

The Board of Trustees of the Midlothian Public Library has established the following policies to govern the selection of and provision to access those materials which as a group constitute the library collection.

In setting forth and adopting these policies the overriding concern is to provide for the systematic development of a broad, balanced, and useful collection which, within the limitations of space and budget, fairly and effectively serves the diverse needs of as many citizens as possible. The Library's goal in this regard is to select, organize, preserve, and make freely and easily available to the people of the community printed and other materials which will assist them in their pursuit of information, education, research, recreation and culture, and in the creative use of their leisure time.

In order to meet its commitment to this goal the Library Board affirms, endorses, and adopts as its own the principles articulated in the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS and the FREEDOM TO READ STATEMENT (appended).

II. RESPONSIBILITY

Ultimate responsibility for selection of all materials rests with the Library Director who operates within the framework of policies and goals established by the Library Board. At the Library Director's discretion, the actual process of selection may be shared with or delegated entirely to qualified staff members.

III. PROCESS

Selection is not a process which lends itself to the easy application of fixed and well-defined rules. Selectors must carefully evaluate the relative merit of all material, always keeping in mind the general objectives articulated above.

IV. CRITERIA

Criteria influencing selection include but are not necessarily limited to the items listed below. It is not possible for library staff to read and review personally the large number of books and other materials produced each year. The information and impressions gathered from aids to selections such as reviews, standard bibliographies, indexes, etc., must, as a rule, serve as the basis for applying these criteria and for judging the merit of a work.

- A. Community demand, whether expressed or anticipated. Demand may be for specific titles or for material in general covering certain timely subjects.
- B. Intrinsic value or quality of a work, relating to such considerations as factual accuracy and authoritativeness of content, comprehensiveness of treatment, style clarity, and effectiveness of expression, creativity, etc. Selection refers to the decision that must be made either to add a specific item or certain types of material to the collection or to retain material already in the collection.
- C. Significance or relevance of a work.

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- D. Scope, depth, or approach of a work. For example, highly technical materials and scholarly studies of extremely limited value to the community at large will, as a rule, not be added to the collection.
- E. Importance of a work in adding balance to or filling gaps in the existing collection. Availability of the material either about the same subject or presenting a similar point of view should be considered.
- F. Compatibility of subject, treatment, or style of a work with its intended audience. This criterion pertains especially to materials being considered for the children's collection.
- G. Authority, reputation, and standing of the author. However, no author's works will be added to or excluded from the collection solely because of his or her personal history, political affiliation, race, sex, cultural background, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- H. Availability of the same title or information at neighboring libraries or through Interlibrary Loan.
- I. Cost of the material.
- J. Suitability of the physical form for library use, including the quality and durability of the format.
- K. Ease and practicality of providing effective physical or bibliographic access to the material.

These criteria will come into play to varying degrees and in various combinations, often overlapping or overriding one another. A title may fall short in one or more categories yet still be selected. Best sellers, for example, much in demand by library patrons for recreational reading, may possess only marginal intrinsic value and social or literary importance, yet may be added to the collection in multiple copies. More rigorous standards will prevail, however, when material is to be added to the Library's permanent subject collection.

V. MATERIALS NOT IN OUR COLLECTION

Similarly, a work can meet one or more of the selection criteria yet be passed over in favor of other material which a selector feels is of greater relative value to the collection as a whole. Should a patron desire any material not in our library's collection, the staff will make every effort to obtain it from another library through normal interlibrary loan channels.

VI. TIMELINESS OF SELECTION AND PURCHASE

Long delays often diminish the value of desired material or information to the library patron. Selectors must remain sensitive to patrons' needs in this regard and to the extent possible, strive for timeliness of selection and purchase. Toward this purpose it is important that demand be anticipated as well as responded to quickly when expressed.

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VII. STAFF COMMITMENT TO SELECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

The Library Board expects selectors to adopt certain basic and minimal practices as a prerequisite to effective selection and collection development.

- a. Diligently examine and keep abreast of reviews, prepublication lists, publishers' catalogs and announcements, standard bibliographies, and other sources which serve as the basis for responsible selection.
- b. Develop and maintain a familiarity with and regularly and systematically assess the strengths and weaknesses of those sections of the existing collection which fall within their respective areas of responsibility. Selection of individual titles must take place within the context of purposeful collection development.
- c. Cooperate and interact with one another to assure that the combined effort is both integrated and comprehensive.

VIII. AREAS OF LIMITED ACQUISITION

Selection of books and other materials in certain areas is limited to very general or basic works which are not too specialized or considered beyond the province of public library service. These areas include:

- a. Textbooks: As a rule, the library will not purchase textbooks required for course work of elementary or secondary schools or institutions of higher learning. However, the Library collection will include considerable material supplemental to various courses of instruction.
- b. Religious Materials: The library will endeavor to build religious collections which offer a broad spectrum of information of the texts, doctrines, history, and leaders of all major religious philosophies. Toward this purpose, the Library will ordinarily purchase or accept as gifts only religious materials of broad general interest. Materials purchased by church owned or church sponsored publishing houses or organizations will be accepted as gifts or be purchased only when they meet the standard selection criteria.

IX. GIFT MATERIALS

The library gratefully accepts gifts of books and other materials, but with the explicit understanding that such materials will be added to the library collection only as needed and only when they meet the same standards of selection which apply to regular library purchases.

When the library receives a cash gift for the purpose of materials, whether as a memorial or for any other purpose, the general nature or subject area of the materials to be purchased will be based on the wishes of the donor. Selection of specific titles, however, will be made in accordance with the needs and selection policies of the library.

Special collections and memorial collections will not as a rule be shelved as separate physical entities. Such collections will be accepted only with the understanding that they will be integrated in the general collection. The only form of memorial identification will be a gift plate.

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The donor of any gift materials must understand that the library in all instances reserves the right to utilize gifts as it sees fit and to dispose of gifts as it sees fit if they are not acceptable library materials or are not needed in the library's collection.

X. WITHDRAWAL OF MATERIALS

To ensure a vital collection of continued value to the community, materials which have deteriorated, become dated, or otherwise outlived their usefulness relative to other materials are withdrawn.

XI. CENSORSHIP

The responsibility of the library is to serve all the community, not to promote—and above all, not to censor—any particular political, moral, philosophical, or religious conviction or opinion. No one, least of all those associated with a public library, has the right to decree what another may or may not read or hear.

Many works are controversial, and any given item may offend some persons. A public library serves many and varied groups of people. It cannot, to satisfy any one group or individual, sacrifice the interests or rights of others. History shows that many of the books which have been most controversial or objectionable to some persons or groups have in due course been recognized to be among those books which most, rather than least, belong in public libraries.

The Library Board holds censorship to be a purely individual matter and declares that while individuals are free to reject for themselves materials of which they do not approve, they cannot exercise censorship to restrict the freedom of others.

With respect to the use of library materials by children, the decision as to what a minor may read is the responsibility of that individual's parent or guardian. Selection will not be inhibited by the possibility that materials may inadvertently come into the possession of minors.

XII. QUESTIONED MATERIAL

Librarians make every attempt to read various reviews and to select materials appropriate to the needs of the community. They cannot, however, personally read or review in depth most of the items added to the Library's collection. It is recognized that a member of the community may find a work personally objectionable. When this occurs, individuals are encouraged to bring concerns regarding any specific item in the Library's collection to the attention of the Library Director either by way of an informal discussion or through a formal complaint process. Those wishing to use the formal complaint process are referred to the following section and to the statement appended to this policy entitled, Request for Reconsideration of Library Material.

XIII. FORMAL COMPLAINT PROCESS

Following receipt of a formal complaint the Library Director together with the selector in whose area of responsibility the item in question falls and one other librarian appointed by the Library Director will review this item.* The Library Director will then make a decision regarding the retention of the material and promptly notify the individual submitting the complaint of this decision. The Library Director shall

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also include in the monthly report to the Library Board information on any formal complaint made to the Library about library material and the decision as to the retention of that material.

In the event that the decision of the Library Director does not satisfy the individual making the complaint, that individual may formally appeal the decision to the Library Board. Upon receiving such an appeal the Board President will appoint a committee of the Board to review the matter. The committee will make its recommendation to the Board which will determine whether any further hearing before the full Board is necessary and ultimately whether the decision of the Library Director in connection with the complaint is to be upheld or overruled.

The Library Director and Board President will make every effort to expedite all the stages of the formal complaint process, but not at the expense of the day-day operation of the library or other pressing issues which may require Board attention.

At the discretion of the Board President, an extended timetable may be developed for the review of any complaint. Similarly, the Board President may determine the procedures and ground rules to be followed when any appeal is given a hearing before the Board or one of its committees.

N. NON-REMOVAL OF CHALLENGED MATERIALS

Material undergoing review within the context of the formal complaint process will not be withdrawn from the collection pending resolution of the process. Should any individual remain dissatisfied after the formal complaint process has been concluded to the satisfaction of the Library Board, he or she is provided legal recourse through the courts. Any challenged item will remain in the collection until a judicial decision directs otherwise.

*If the item in question falls within the selection area of Library Director, two librarians will be appointed.

Adopted 2/2013, Reviewed 2/2016, Revised 3/2017, 3/2018, Reviewed 3/2019, Revised 2/2020, Reviewed 7/2021, Revised 10/2021, Reviewed 7/2022, 7/2023

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APPENDICES

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 June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996.

FREEDOM TO READ STATEMENT

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.

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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 untried 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.*

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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.

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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.

Adopted June 25, 1953, by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee; amended January 28, 1972; January 16, 1991; July 12, 2000; June 30, 2004.