

Challenge Support



(<https://ctt.ac/rhlue>)

(/tools/challengesupport/report)

The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom provides confidential support during censorship challenges to library materials, services, and programs. Anyone can report censorship, even if they do not require assistance. Report censorship by filling out **this online form** (<http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report>), or contacting OIF Assistant Director Kristin Pekoll at 800-545-2433, ext. 4221, or via email: kpekoll@ala.org (<mailto:kpekoll@ala.org>).



As stated in Article III of the *Library Bill of Rights*, “Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.”

- A **challenge** is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A **banning** is the removal of those materials. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others.
- **Censorship** is a change in the access status of material, based on the content of the work and made by a governing authority or its representatives. Such changes include exclusion, restriction, removal, or age/grade level changes.
- **Intellectual freedom** is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored.

Personal Support during a Reconsideration Process

- **When should you contact the Office for Intellectual Freedom** (<http://www.ala.org/oif>) for help?

Anytime. If there are whispers of concern and you want to make sure you're on solid footing and get encouragement from a friendly voice, you can contact the Office for Intellectual Freedom. If you have a question about your current operations and want to make sure they align with best practices, you can contact us. If you witness authorities subverting the policy, you can contact us. If you want to strengthen your defense of the material and support of its inclusion in your collection and need resources, you can contact us. If a concerned adult posted a complaint on social media and you need guidance, you can contact us. If you get a call from a local reporter out of the blue and don't know how to respond, you can contact us. If your committee evaluated the material and recommended to retain it in the collection and you want to celebrate, you can contact us. If everyone in your life is tired of hearing you talk about this book challenge or you feel you have no one you can confidentially share with, you can contact us.

We get calls and emails every day and it is our priority to be available to you. Don't hesitate to email, call or fill out an online reporting form (<http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report>).

- **How to respond to challenges and concerns about library resources**
(</tools/challengesupport/respond>)

With such a wide spectrum of ideas and information available, it's inevitable that people will occasionally encounter resources they believe to be offensive or inappropriate. They may complain and request that such resources be removed. This page provides step-by step suggestions about how to respond.

- **What is your institution's policy and procedure?**

Locate your policy. Is it online? In a binder at your service desk? In your director's office? Many libraries have their policies located both within the physical building or accessible through their website. The reconsideration policy may be part of the collection development policy or instructional materials policy. If your library is part of a branch system or school district, this policy may be located at the central headquarters.

- **Formal written requests for reconsideration**
(</tools/challengesupport/requestforreconsideration>)

If the library receives a completed reconsideration form, the person or group designated in library policy to handle challenges should follow these guidelines from receipt to decision.

- **Guidelines for reconsideration committees** (</tools/challengesupport/reconsiderationcommittees>)

Under the best professional standards, reconsideration policies ask those charged with reviewing a challenged book to set aside their personal beliefs and evaluate the work in light of the objective standards outlined in the library's materials selection policy. Listed are some best practices for Reconsideration Committee members.

- **Challenge hearings** (</tools/challengesupport/hearing>)

If a challenge rises to the level of an appeal, your library's reconsideration process may call for a public hearing by your governing board as part of the appeal process. If it does, the following tips may be helpful.

- **Working with the media** (</tools/challengesupport/media>)

When appropriate, as the challenge becomes public, library and school district administrators may seek the support of local media. Informing local civic organizations of the facts and enlisting their support may counter negative, one-sided media coverage with moderate, tempered discussion. These tips will keep you calm and collected while you address the media about the challenge

- **When the reconsideration process is subverted or undermined**

Sometimes the principal or library director does not follow policy and removes the challenged resource or cancels the event. If the administration refuses to follow the reconsideration process, even after discussing the legal and ethical reasons for doing so, how far should library workers go to defend the challenged resource?

This is a personal, ethical decision, and library workers must weigh all factors. If the director or principal is adamant, library workers may be forced to evaluate the risk of retaliation from their supervisor or losing a job against the merits of continuing to oppose the censorship attempt. After considering the situation carefully, they may come to acknowledge that they have done all that is possible at this time, or they may decide that taking a principled stand is worth the risk.

The reconsideration process can also be compromised if the concerned individual or group goes around the policy structure to speak directly to a higher authority such as an elected official, school superintendent, or board members. Although this does not always occur, optimally, higher authorities should be redirected to the reconsideration process and reminded of relevant policies.

Guiding Documents to Safeguard Intellectual Freedom and Prepare your Library, School or College Against Censorship

(<https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/intellectual-freedom-manual-tenth-edition>)

As with any public service, libraries receive complaints. One of our responsibilities is to listen in a respectful and fair manner. The complaints that library workers often worry about most are those dealing with library materials, privacy and the internet. The key to successfully handling these complaints is to be sure the library staff and the governing authorities are all knowledgeable about the complaint procedures and their implementation.

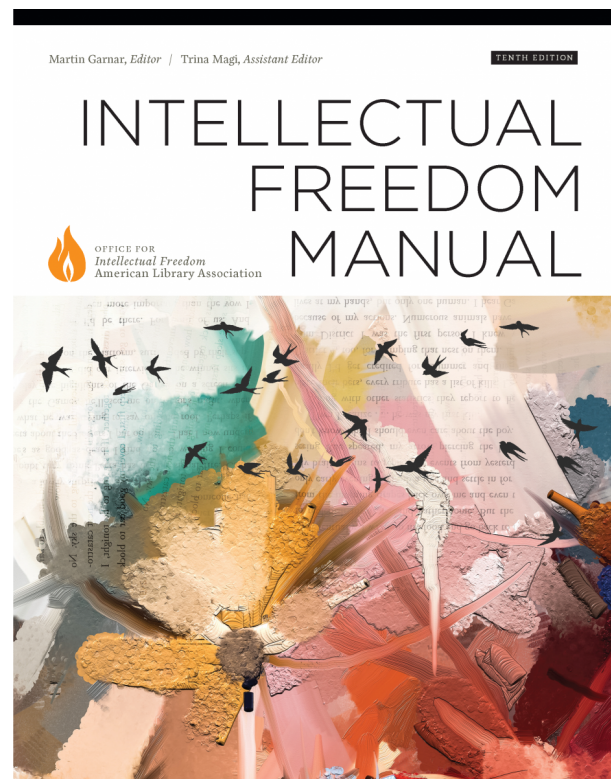
- **Library Bill of Rights Interpretations**

(<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations>)

Although the Articles of the Library Bill of Rights are unambiguous statements of basic principles that should govern the service of all libraries, questions do arise concerning application of these principles to specific library practices. The interpretations are designed by the Intellectual Freedom Committee (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/committees/ala/ala-if>) to clarify the implications and applications of the original six articles. These documents are policies of the American Library Association, having been adopted by the ALA Council (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/council>).

- **Intellectual Freedom Manual** (<https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/intellectual-freedom-manual-tenth-edition>)

Written by Martin Garnar and Trina Magi. Tenth Edition. Chicago: ALA Editions. 2021



- **Developing Policies (<http://libguides.ala.org/librarypolicy>)** - LibGuide developed by ALA librarians (2016)
 - Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, and Academic Libraries (<http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit>) (2018)
 - Privacy and Confidentiality Policy (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/privacyconfidentiality/toolkitsprivacy/Developing-or-Revising-a-Library-Privacy-Policy>) - Excerpted from the Privacy Tool Kit (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/privacyconfidentiality/toolkitsprivacy/privacy>) (2014)

- **Answering questions about youth and access to library resources**
([/tools/challengesupport/youthresourcesFAQ](http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/youthresourcesFAQ))

If your library serves youth, you may find that you need to respond to a concerned adult such as a parent, guardian or board member about resources and services in your collection. This document is designed to help you explain how and why your library selects the resources it provides. It can also help you respond to questions and challenges about material that adults may consider inappropriate.

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