

November 2018 Tuesday Topic: Programming Policies and Intellectual Freedom

Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to one of the [co-chairs of the IFC](#).



Programming Policies and Intellectual Freedom

Most librarians are familiar with the need for collection development policies to guide the selection of materials for the library and to offer procedural guidance in the case of a challenge to materials. But as programming becomes an increasing aspect of librarianship – particularly public librarianship – the need for policies regarding the development of library-initiated programs is often overlooked.

In [Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#), the American Library Association Council recognizes library programs as a means of enhancing the library's mission "by providing users with additional opportunities for accessing information, education, and recreation." The interpretation goes on to offer best practices in terms of offering library programs in an equitable manner, including helpful information that can be incorporated into a programming policy.

Why is a policy necessary?

A programming policy is valuable for the same reasons a collection development policy is so necessary: it offers structure and guidance in selecting topics and presenters, it lays out the ways in which library programs support the library's mission, and it clarifies for the public that library-initiated programs do not constitute endorsement of the program content or views expressed. It also offers information to the public regarding the procedure for expressing concerns or complaints about a library program. In this way, it is very helpful both to the public and to staff who may need to address question and concerns about library events.

Creating a Policy

Plan on working closely with your legal counsel and governing body to put together the policy that is best for your library and circumstances. An excellent place to start in

creating or revising your library's programming policy is to look to the library's collection development and building use policies. Often the criteria given for determining which books to add to the collection can be adapted to reflect the criteria used to select program topics and presenters. In addition to the Interpretation referenced above, the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom's [Responding to and Preparing for Controversial Programs and Speakers](#) offers valuable points to consider in crafting one's policy.

It can also be helpful to look at quality policies from other libraries. Here are a few excellent examples from public libraries:

[Cincinnati Public Library Programming Policy](#)

[Midlothian Public Library Programming Policy](#)

[East Greenbush Community Library](#)

[Beaverton Public Library Programming Policy](#)

With a little bit of foresight and work, a programming policy can allow your library to approach potentially controversial topics with confidence.

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