

Ontario Public Library

Policy 4005.7

DIVERSE COLLECTIONS: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Collection development should reflect the philosophy inherent in Article I of the Library Bill of Rights: “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.” A diverse collection should contain content by and about a wide array of people and cultures to authentically reflect a variety of ideas, information, stories, and experiences.

Library workers have an obligation to select, maintain, and support access to content on subjects by diverse authors and creators that meets—as closely as possible—the needs, interests, and abilities of all the people the library serves. This means acquiring materials to address popular demand and direct community input, as well as addressing collection gaps and unexpressed information needs. Library workers have a professional and ethical responsibility to be proactively inclusive in collection development and in the provision of interlibrary loan where offered.

A well-balanced collection does not require a one-to-one equivalence for each viewpoint but should strive for equity in content and ideas that takes both structural inequalities and the availability of timely, accurate materials into account. A diverse collection should contain a variety of works chosen pursuant to the library’s selection policy and subject to periodic review.

Collection development, as well as cataloging and classification, should be done according to professional standards and established procedures. Developing a diverse collection requires:

- selecting content in multiple formats;
- considering resources from self-published, independent, small, and local producers;
- seeking content created by and representative of marginalized and underrepresented groups;
- evaluating how diverse collection resources are cataloged, labeled, and displayed;
- including content in all of the languages used in the community that the library serves, when possible; and
- providing resources in formats that meet the needs of users with disabilities.¹

Best practices in collection development assert that materials should not be excluded from a collection solely because the content or its creator may be considered offensive or controversial. Refusing to select resources due to potential controversy is considered censorship, as is withdrawing resources for that reason. Libraries have a responsibility to defend against challenges that limit a collection’s diversity of content. Challenges commonly cite content viewed as inappropriate, offensive, or controversial, which may include but is not limited to prejudicial language and ideas, political content, economic theory, social philosophies, religious beliefs, scientific research, sexual content, and representation of diverse sexual orientations, expressions, and gender identities.

Intellectual freedom, the essence of equitable library services, provides for free access to varying expressions of ideas through which a question, cause, or movement may be explored. Library workers

POLICY ADOPTED: 11/17/1992
REVISED: 07/19/2011
REVIEWED: 09/17/2019

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have a professional and ethical responsibility to be fair and just in defending the library user's right to read, view, or listen to content protected by the First Amendment, regardless of the creator's viewpoint or personal history. Library workers must not permit their personal biases, opinions, or preferences to unduly influence collection development decisions.²

¹ "Services to People with Disabilities: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/servicespeopledisabilities>)," adopted January 28, 2009, by the ALA Council under the title "Services to Persons with Disabilities"; amended June 26, 2018.

²ALA Code of Ethics, Article VII, adopted at the 1939 Midwinter Meeting by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; and January 22, 2008.

Adopted July 14, 1982, by the ALA Council; amended January 10, 1990; July 2, 2008; July 1, 2014 under previous name "Diversity in Collection Development"; and June 24, 2019.

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