

# Materials Challenge Readiness



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# Session Goals

## *Review*

- How to prepare for and respond to concerns/challenges
- Importance of policies, procedures, communication and support

## *Practice*

- Ways to respond at various points in a challenge scenario

## *Share*

- Resources for reviewing your policies and procedures and communication plan
- State/national resources for information and support

## *Develop a Plan*

- Things you can do
- Where you can turn for support



# **Session Slide Handout**



**When I think about the work I do in the current climate in which public attacks, complaints and challenges to library materials are on the rise, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.**





## What makes things different now than in the past?

- Polarization (national and local)
  - Animosity/Mistrust/Fear
  - Public demonstrations and posturing
- Social media
- Politicization
  - Legislation
- Publishing
- Impact on libraries and library staff



**How has the current climate impacted your collection development, programming and/or display decisions?**





# **Part 1. Be Prepared and Proactive: Policies, Procedures, Communication**

# BEFORE A CHALLENGE



## Policies & Procedures

- Review your library reconsideration policies and procedures
- Meet with director to clarify any questions/discuss staff training
- Meet with board president/trustees to discuss P&P and intellectual freedom—help them review their responsibilities and learn how to respond to questions

**Public Library Policies and Procedures Review Activity  
(Handout)**



## Do your policies/procedures clarify:

- Who can bring a challenge?(*anyone your library is funded to serve or anyone anywhere?*)
- How to bring a challenge
- Timelines (how long does the library have to respond)
- Access to materials during challenge
- Who serves on reconsideration committee (if applicable)
- Right to appeal
- How long the decision stands
- Affirm intellectual freedom and the Library Bill of Rights?
- Do you know where to find related documents (e.g, Request for Reconsideration form)

# BEFORE A CHALLENGE



## Communication

### Staff Understanding/Training

- Share information about selection of materials, intellectual freedom and reconsideration process with *all* staff members
- Make sure all staff know what to do if they are approached with a concern or complaint by a member of the public or fellow staff member

### External Communication & Advocacy

- Clarify who will speak for the library publicly and what staff should do if asked/or approached
- Educate the public about how and why materials are chosen for the library (ongoing)


[Public Library Communication Review Activity \(Handout\)](#)

[ALA Working with the Media Toolkit](#)

# How and why library materials are chosen: Sample Talking Points


- The library collection is curated following board-approved policies and procedures, which are guided by our mission
- We approach collection development with the understanding that the library is a place of *choice*
- Books are not rejected (or selected) based solely on the ideas expressed in them
- The age/grade range of children and teens served is absolutely taken into consideration as selection decisions are made, based on the suggested audience for materials noted in reviews and/or other professional resources as outlined in the board-approved policy and/or related procedures
- Children and teens have the right to access information and ideas
- Parents / guardians have the right to determine what they want their own children to read, and the responsibility to monitor/communicate expectations to their own children
- Parents/guardians do not have the right to limit access to materials for other people's children
- Community members have the right to request specific material be reconsidered for the collection, as outlined in board-approved policies and related procedures

# Mead Public Library (Sheboygan) Staff Handout

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- How we build our collection
  - How do I ensure my children are accessing age-appropriate material?
  - What if I want something removed?\*

\*What can I do if I have a concern about something in the library?

# DURING A CHALLENGE: Communicate

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- Ensure all involved in process understand their responsibility
  - Speak matter-of-factly with supervisors/board members about importance of following board-approved P&P (e.g., “I know we want to make sure we follow our board-approved policy and procedures...”)
  - Clarify library spokesperson/review messaging for media/public (i.e., “We strive to meet the wide-ranging needs and interests of our community, we take concerns seriously and are committed to following our board-approved policies and procedures, which are designed to address all concerns fairly and equitably”)
  - Contact the [CCBC](#) (in Wisconsin) for information about the book/concern (outside Wisconsin: contact [ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom](#) )
  - Share information you receive about the material in question along with library goals/selection criteria, with director/ committee members/trustees as needed/appropriate
  - Make sure staff are informed/supported

# What if some people don't care about, or won't follow, the policies and procedures?

(i.e., the process for registering and responding to a concern or complaint is ignored)

- Complainants
- Staff
- Supervisors/Administrators
- Board members

[CCBC What IF: Most Important Thing in Responding to Materials Challenges](#)

## AFTER A CHALLENGE: Reflect, Debrief, Revise

- What went well? (e.g., outcome, internal communication, external communication, following policies and procedures)
- What did you learn?
- Plan for revisions to policies and/or procedures if needed (but don't wait for a concern or challenge to review and make any necessary changes!)
- Plan for improvements to internal and external communication if needed

# BEFORE/DURING/AFTER A CHALLENGE: Find and Build Support

- For yourself:
  - Find trusted colleagues in your network whom you can talk with confidentially, including about selection doubts and second-guessing.
- For the library:
  - Help others understand that libraries are places of *choice* and the goal is a collection that meets the diverse needs and interests of all the children and teens the library serves, so they'll all find books and other materials to engage them.
  - Help others understand that purchasing decisions are made following board-approved selection criteria and professional guidelines.
- In/for your community:
  - Build a local network & show support for local peers and institutions






**Questions?**



## **Part 2. Materials Challenge Stress Test**



A grandparent in your community has come into the library upset about the picture book *When Aidan Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff.

They said they thought it was about a family having a new baby, but when they sat down to read it to their grandson, who is going to become a big brother, they discovered it was about a child confused about whether they were a girl or a boy. The grandparent can't believe the library is promoting a book "like this," which will certainly lead to even greater confusion among children.

**How do you respond?**

You've thanked the grandparent for sharing their concern, listened to them talk about the book not being appropriate for young children, confirmed that the book was part of a recent display on Families (which is where the grandparent saw it), noted that not every book in the library will be the right fit for every child or family but are confident every child and family can find book to enjoy at the library and offered to help them find other books.

The grandparent declines, saying they're more concerned about making sure this book is no longer in the library.

**What do you say to the parent/grandparent next?**

You've let the grandparent know about the library reconsideration process, which starts with them completing a request for reconsideration form. You provide them with a copy of the form. Before they turn away they say, "You can bet I'll be back with this."

**What do you do after the person leaves?**

Two days later, the grandparent drops off the completed form. It was handed to the teenager behind the desk who is a library page. The form notes that the book is “disgusting” and “violates the teaching of God.” Stapled to the form is a copy of the letter the grandparent has sent to their pastor about the book.

The form is given to you by the library page.

**What do you need to think about/do next?**

## NEXT STEPS:



- **Review** reconsideration process
  - **Compile** relevant information (see below)
  - **Communicate** with committee, board leadership, staff, others as needed (e.g., media)
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- Library mission/goals
  - Selection policy, including criteria for selection
  - Review committee charge
  - Information about intellectual freedom; right to seek and receive information
  - Any relevant statements from the library board and/or your funding agency(ies) related to equity
  - Professional assessment information about the material
  - Talking points about libraries, choice, intellectual freedom
  - Check in with staff



## Reminder:

### **Wisconsin Statute 43.001 (Libraries)**

**(1)** The legislature recognizes:

- (a)** The importance of free access to knowledge, information and diversity of ideas by all residents of this state;
- (b)** The critical role played by public, school, special and academic libraries in providing that access;
- (d)** The importance of public libraries to the democratic process

**[CCBC What IF: Questions about Diverse Materials](#)**



In accordance with your policies and procedures, an internal committee (members designated by position) vote to retain the book in the collection. You notify the complainant of the decision and their right to appeal in writing to the full board within 14 days, in accordance with your policies and procedures. The appeal is received.

Additionally, word gets out in the community via a Facebook post. Some patrons begin to ask questions and comment when they come into the library. Some make it a point to say they support the decision to retain the book. One person says, “I don’t want someone else deciding what I can check out.” Another asks, “Why would you ever have such a book?”

**What do you do next?**

The board meeting at which the appeal is being considered is packed. A number of people register to speak. Those speaking against the book insist it's harmful to children. To your surprise, however, over half of those who speak publicly are supportive of keeping the book in the collection. "If I don't like it I don't have to check it out," says one. "I want to teach my children compassion and acceptance," says another. "My six-year-old niece is transgender," says a third. "How is she harmful?"

You give a brief presentation on how library materials are chosen following board-approved policies and procedures, which align to the library's mission and goals, and how this book fits into those criteria. After a long night, the board votes 6-3 to keep the book in the collection.

**What do you do after the final decision is made?**

“Book banning is an act of fear and one with disproportionate risk to Black and brown children. When we allow the stigmatization of books that name the lived experiences of a community, we're cutting that community off from its most powerful resource for success: the power of its own stories. “

Author Meg Medina



“What I’m learning is that a book challenge is like a community attacking itself. The people who are hurt in a challenge are the marginalized readers in the community where the challenge takes place.”

Author Maia Kobabe



“If we want to raise young people who are ready to succeed, learn, and love in a diverse and complex world, we need to give them access to challenging literature that represents a range of American experiences, not just the dominant culture.”

Author Ashley Hope Perez





# Resources

## CCBC

- [Intellectual Freedom Information Services](#) (confidential support for Wisconsin librarians and educators, including book information, consultation and referral)
- [What IF ... Questions and Answers on Intellectual Freedom Forum](#)
- [Be Prepared](#) and [Materials Concern Checklist/Tips and Talking Points](#) Infographics
- [Resources and Links](#)

## ALA

- [Fight Censorship Resources](#)
- [Working with the Media Toolkit](#)



**Break**



## **Part 3. Role Playing**

# Practice



- Responding calmly (deep breath)
- Listening openly
- Saying thank you for bringing concern
- Restating what you heard/asking for clarification if needed
- Talking conversationally about the library's mission/ purpose of collection (i.e., how and why library materials are chosen)
- Talking about the library as a place of *choice* (books for everyone, not every book for everyone)
- Affirming that parents/guardians should absolutely decide what's best for their own children and that every family is different regarding the choices they make
- Indicating next steps if concern is not resolved—be clear on any follow-up you'll do

# Remember

- You are building positive relationships with patrons/community members all the time through the work you do. Take that knowledge into your conversations.
- Your role is to listen, and inform as possible, not disagree *or* agree.
- The reconsideration process should come up only if/after attempts at informal resolution aren't successful.

- You are a parent upset by a graphic novel called *I am Alfonso Jones*, which illuminates incidences of Black and brown people dying at the hands of police. Your teenage son brought it home from the library. You have many police officers in your family. You think the book is racist against white people and anti-police.
- You are a community member upset after reading a post on Facebook saying that the library has pornographic materials available for children. One in particular that was mentioned on Facebook is called “It’s Normal, or Perfectly Normal, or something like that.” She notes that the Facebook post indicated that the individual had contacted the local newspaper as well.
- You are a grandparent wanting to know if the library has books for children that promote “a homosexual agenda.” You brought a list of such books—does the library have them?
- You are a parent who can’t believe the library allows children and teens to have access to books that go against their family’s values. Why would the library even own books like *Gender Queer* and *I Am Jazz*, let alone encourage kids to check them out?
- You are library board member. Your sister-in-law, who lives in a neighboring community, has told you the library there is promoting Critical Race Theory, and you hope that isn’t the case here. You don’t want your grandchildren coming home with books that make them feel guilty for being white.
- You are a parent who attended a recent story time with your preschooler and appreciated that the books that were shared included diverse children and families. However, you noticed that one of the books—you can’t remember the name of it—had illustrations that made members of a Black family resemble monkeys on some pages. You’re concerned that this reinforces stereotypes of Black people.





## **Part 4. Action and Support Plans**

## Action Plan

What are 2-4 things you will do when you go back to your library to prepare for responding to concerns and/or challenges.

## Library Support

Who are key people and/or groups in *your community* whom you can call on to speak out in support of the library.

## Professional Network

Who are one or two colleagues within and beyond your community you can contact *right now* to ask if you can reach out for support in *case* of a challenge—people to whom you can also offer reciprocal support if it should happen to them?

## Personal Support

Who are one two or three people you know you can talk to about what's happening in case of a challenge or concern —colleagues, or people in your personal life, whom you trust to allow you to safely process your feelings with understanding and without judgment, knowing they will keep what you say confidential.



# Thank You!

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