

Public Library Policies and Procedures Review Activity

Introduction

When material is challenged, Wisconsin public libraries must follow their board-approved reconsideration process. Determining whether the material will be retained in the collection means evaluating the material and the complaint in light of the library's mission, goals and collection development policy and related selection criteria as outlined in policies and procedures.

Sometimes, the reconsideration process reveals where policies and procedures have gaps or lack clarity, or aren't as strong as they might be in articulating the library's role in supporting the needs and interest of everyone in the community the library serves, such as affirming intellectual freedom as a foundational principle that strengthens the library's ability to carry out its mission in service to all.

The purpose of this review activity is three-fold:

1. To make sure you are familiar with the reconsideration process at your library;
2. To identify areas where your policies and procedures may have gaps, lack clarity, or might benefit from strengthening;
3. To prepare or reinforce your preparedness in responding to concerns, complaints and challenges.

The related **Public Library Communication Review Activity** is designed to help you think through essential components of communication around ongoing education and advocacy and at the time of concern, complaint or challenge.

Definitions:

Policies: Policies are approved by the library board. They are required by state legislation and typically created under the guidance of the director with input from staff, board and sometimes community members. They provide direction and guidance for library operations and management and how the library serves the public.

Procedures: Procedures outline processes/actions by which the work of the library is carried out. Procedures must align to board-approved policies but typically are created by the director and staff and don't have to be approved by the board (unless a policy exists that state they must be).

Statements: Statements affirming intellectual freedom, the Library Bill of Rights, and other core values of the library profession have been created by various professional organizations and may be referenced in policies. Other relevant statements, such as those affirming a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, may also be created and passed by the governing authority in a community where a library is located. Your library mission statement is also an important document to consider as part of this exercise; policies and procedures should align to the library mission and stated ideals and values.

Part 1: Reviewing Documents

For this activity, you will need your library’s mission statement and selection and reconsideration policies and procedures. As these reference other documents and statements, such as the Library Bill of Rights, or specific Wisconsin state statutes and codes, you may also want to print review these.

For each item listed in the chart:

1. Highlight where it occurs in a board-approved policy, a related procedure/administrative guideline, and/or other document, such as a the library mission statement, and/or a statement from your municipal government affirming a commitment to equity and/or diversity and inclusion.
2. Use the chart to indicate where the language was found (specify name of policy, procedure or document)
3. In the Notes field write down questions that arise or things that stand out to you. This may be a step that is unclear (e.g. document says “a review committee is formed” but doesn’t indicate who should comprise the committee) or a gap that occurs to you.

Key Things to Look for/Questions to Ask:

Do some steps or processes in your policies and/or procedures lack clarity?

Do your policies and procedures make clear how and why library materials are chosen by outlining:

- How collection development aligns to broader mission of library?
- Who is responsible for selection by position?
- Criteria for selecting materials?
- Resources used in selecting materials (e.g., professional reviews, professional recommended lists)?
- How donations are handled (Best Practice: they are evaluated according to selection criteria) and what happens to donations that aren’t added to collection?
- How patron requests for materials are handled?

Do your policies and procedures outline:

- Who can bring a challenge (e.g., anyone in community you’re funded to serve, or anyone at all)?
- How to bring a challenge?
- Timelines for responding to a request for reconsideration?
- Who serves on reconsideration committee?
- Role of reconsideration committee? (e.g., to evaluate the book in light of the collection development criteria / library mission)
- The right to appeal a decision and related process to the board?
- How long final reconsideration decision stands?

Do your policies and procedures include these professional best practices?

- Affirm intellectual freedom and the Library Bill of Rights?
- Maintain access to materials during a challenge?
- Require a separate request for reconsideration be submitted for *each* item being questioned?

Language to look for:	Policy (Specify)	Procedure (Specify)	Other Document (Specify)	Not Found	Notes
Aligns collection development to library mission and states importance of materials providing diverse viewpoints, reflecting diversity of community, plurality of our society, etc.					
Affirms intellectual freedom and/or the Library Bill of Rights.					
Specifies criteria for selection (should indicate not all criteria need to be met) and (types of) resources that are consulted in selection process.					
Specifies resources consulted in collection development (e.g., professional reviews)					
Address how donations are handled?					
Address how patron requests are handled?					

Language to look for:	Policy (Specify)	Procedure (Specify)	Other Document (Specify)	Not Found	Notes
Specifies who can challenge materials (e.g, everyone in community the library is funded to serve).					
Requires complainant to fill out a reconsideration form for <i>each</i> item they want reconsidered					
Asks if the complainant has read/viewed/listened to entire work they are objecting to. (Reconsideration form)					
Asks what the complainant wants to see happen to material. (Reconsideration form)					
Allows continued access to materials during reconsideration process.					
Indicates timeframe for library response with language that offers some flexibility (in case the library is inundated with requests).					
Outlines who (by position/s) will make decision about request for reconsideration (e.g, reconsideration committee) and their charge?					

Language to look for:	Policy (Specify)	Procedure (Specify)	Other Document (Specify)	Not Found	Notes
Makes clear reconsideration process evaluates material in light of stated selection goals and criteria					
Does/Does not (circle one) put decision-making in hands of a single individual. (Not recommended.)					
Offers appeal process (timeframe for appealing, who hears appeal, timeframe for response) for reconsideration decision.					
Indicates how long a final decision (appeal) stands before same material can be challenged again.					

Part 2: Planning for Change

Review the chart including your notes to determine potential areas of concern in your policies, procedures, and other materials. This will identify items where revisions or additions may be necessary. Remember:

- Procedures are much more manageable for implementing change as they generally don't require board-approval.
- Proposed revisions to procedures should be made by a team designated by the library director.
- Proposed revisions to policies should involve the board and follow existing protocols for creating/revising policy.

Resources

- Wisconsin Public Library Policy Resources: <https://dpi.wi.gov/pld/boards-directors/policy-resources>
- Wisconsin Public Library Trustee Essentials Handbook (see especially Chapter 10: Developing Effective Policies): <https://dpi.wi.gov/pld/boards-directors/trustee-essentials-handbook>
- American Library Association Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit: <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit>
- *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, Tenth Edition. American Library Association, 2021 (<https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/intellectual-freedom-manual-tenth-edition>)