

PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMUNICATION REVIEW ACTIVITY

Communication, education and advocacy are critical components of library work before a challenge ever happens, as well as when a concern is expressed or a challenge occurs.

Everyone benefits when staff, board and community members all understand that libraries are places of choice offering collections curated following board-approved policies and procedures to meet the needs and interests of everyone in the community the library serves. The library benefits when staff, board and community members understand that they all have the right to decide what they want to read, and what they want their own children to read, but that right does not extend to limiting choices for other individuals and families.

This communication review activity is designed to identify areas where libraries need a communication plan, including staff and trustee training, and talking points for ongoing education and advocacy.

The related **Public Library Policies and Procedures Review Activity** is designed to help assure you are familiar with, and provide you with an opportunity to evaluate, your library selection and reconsideration policies and procedures. You will find language in policies, procedures and related statements and documents that are part of that activity which will be important to your communication plan.

Part 1: Assessment of Communication around Ongoing Education and Advocacy

Read through each of the following statements and choose a number indicating how you feel about it:

- 1 - Confident that this is true
- 2 - Working on this
- 3 - Need to develop a plan for this
- 4 – Not sure

Use the **Notes** column to explain your response.

Statement	Rank (1-3)	Notes
Staff members at all levels understand that the library serves everyone in the community and how and why we select materials.		
Staff members at all levels understand the basics of intellectual freedom and the importance of choice in libraries.		
Board members/trustees understand that the library serves everyone in the community and how and why we select materials.		
Board members/trustees understand the basics of intellectual freedom and the importance of choice in libraries.		
We've done a good job educating the community about the fact that the library serves everyone in the community and how and why we select materials.		
We've done a good job educating the community about the basics of intellectual freedom and the importance of choice in libraries.		

Part II: Assessment of Communication around Concerns, Complaints and Challenges

Read through each of the following statements and choose a number indicating how you feel about it:

- 1 - Confident that this is true
- 2 - Working on this
- 3 - Need to develop a plan for this
- 4 – Not sure

Use the **Notes** column to explain your response.

Item	Rank (1-3)	Notes
I feel prepared to listen to someone who has a concern or complaint and also speak about our library offering choices to serve everyone in our community.		
I know whom to inform (e.g., supervisor, director, board president) in the case of a concern or complaint or if a formal request for reconsideration is made.		
Our public facing staff has received training in what to do in case someone expresses a concern or voices a complaint (e.g., basics in what to say/not say, whom to refer the patron to).		
I'm clear on who the designated spokesperson is if the media or others contact the library about a concern/challenge.		
Our staff has received training in who does/does not speak for the library in case media or others make inquiries.		
If I am the designated spokesperson for the media and others, I am clear on what to say at the time of a concern/challenge.		
Our library board/trustees are clear on their role at the time of a concern/challenge.		

Item	Rank (1-3)	Notes
Our collection development/reconsideration policies, procedures and related forms are familiar to staff.		
Our collection development/reconsideration policies, procedures and related forms are familiar to board members/trustees.		
Our collection development/reconsideration policies, procedures and related forms are accessible to the community.		
I know where can I get information and support in case of a concern /challenge.		

Part 3: Strategies for Moving Forward

Review your responses and prioritize actionable items. As you develop communication materials and strategies, consider the best ways to connect with each group of stakeholders and how to deliver your messages. Remember that once you develop several key talking points, they can be adapted for a variety of situations. Also remember that **You are doing advocacy work all the time with the positive patron interactions and goodwill you build every day.**

Think about developing your communication plan around your internal and external communication needs, both of which are critical. For example:

- **Communication with Staff:**

- General: How can you provide staff at all levels with a basic understanding of the library's commitment to serving the entire community, how and why materials are chosen (e.g., collections are curated following board-approved policies and procedures that align to library's mission and goals), and the basics of intellectual freedom, including the critical concept of patron choice.
- At time of challenge: How will you keep staff informed about what is happening and what they should/should not do if asked about it at work. How will you make sure vulnerable staff feel supported?

- **Communication with Stakeholders (trustees, community members, funders)**

- General (Education and Advocacy): How can help board/trustees and the community understand and embrace the library's commitment to the entire community and that intellectual freedom and the idea of choice are keys to your ability to do this in a fair and equitable manner?
- At time of challenge, including media: What is your key messaging? (e.g., Rather than engaging about the specific material, talk about the library's commitment to serving everyone in the community by offering a wide range of choices, knowing that every individual and family is different. You curate a collection following board-approved policies and procedures that align to your library's mission to provide materials to serve the diverse needs and interests of community members and that reflect the world in which they live. (Look to your mission statement and goals for language you can use.) You might stress, too, that the library takes concerns as seriously as it takes its commitment to providing materials for the entire community, which is why there is a board-approved policy that the library follows when someone has a concern about material.)

Resources:

- DPI Trustee Essentials Handbook: <https://dpi.wi.gov/pld/boards-directors/trustee-essentials-handbook>
- American Library Association “Working with the Media” Toolkit: <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/media>
- CCBC links and resources created for responding to concerns, complaints and challenges: <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/intellectual-freedom-2/education-and-advocacy/>
- CCBC IF Services: <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/intellectual-freedom-2/intellectual-freedom/>

Talking Points:

Look to your library’s mission statement and policies for language referencing commitment to diversity in collections and services. Also look to statements on diversity, equity and inclusion that may have been issued by your municipal government.

Below are additional potential talking points (adapted from various posts in the the CCBC What IF: Questions and Answers on Intellectual Freedom forum: <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/category/what-if/>)

- The right to seek and receive information is a foundation of our democracy; indeed is essential to it.
- Children and teens as well as adults have First Amendment rights to seek and receive information.
- Parents and guardians have the right to decide what they want their own children to read; the library cannot play that role for them for many reasons, including the fact that every family is different in what they will decide.
- “Choice” is an essential concept in libraries– no one is forced to read or check out anything.
- Libraries never assume every book is a good fit for everyone but provide a range of curated materials so everyone can find things to meet their needs and interests.
- Censorship infringes on the rights and choices of others, including other parents and guardians to make choices for their own children and families regarding what they read.
- Commitment to intellectual freedom assures that the rights of everyone in the community are respected when selection decisions are made and concerns are addressed.
- Publicly funded libraries have a responsibility to follow board-approved policies in selecting materials to meet the wide-ranging needs, and interests of everyone in the communities they serve.
- Publicly funded libraries have a responsibility to follow their board-approved policies and procedures to address materials concerns.