

Position on Protest and Disagreement related to Collections, Programs and Speakers in Libraries. An Interpretation of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations' Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries

The articles of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques' (CFLA-FCAB) [Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries](#) are explicit declarations of basic principles that govern the service of all publicly funded Canadian libraries; nonetheless, questions do arise regarding application of these principles to specific library practices.

This document provides an interpretation of the CFLA-FCAB's Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries concerning protest and disagreement, which affirms: "libraries resist efforts to limit the exercise of these responsibilities (intellectual freedom) while recognizing the right of criticism by individuals and groups." The CFLA-FCAB Statement on Diversity and Inclusion states: "Libraries understand that an acceptance of differences can place individual and collective values in conflict. Libraries are committed to tolerance and understanding. Libraries act to ensure that people can enjoy services free from any attempt by others to impose values, customs or beliefs."

Demonstrating a commitment to Intellectual Freedom, libraries are spaces where a diverse range of opinions and perspectives can be held and shared, and where debate and critical enquiry can take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect for, and understanding of, civil liberties. Libraries believe and support an individual's right to disagree with the views of a speaker, content, or topic and libraries value the importance of protest or dissent – that is, the right to express disagreement in a manner that does not prevent access by others.

The following points are critical operational considerations to applying CFLA-FCAB's position on protest and disagreement:

- CFLA-FCAB affirms controversial expression is part of Intellectual Freedom and, as a result, supported in the library. Equally so, challenge to controversial expression is also supported.
- CFLA-FCAB affirms that the right to disagree is a complement to the right to speak, listen, read or view, but these rights need not occur at the same time or place. For example, a speaker (whether a library user, invited speaker or performer) is entitled to communicate their message to an audience, and the audience is entitled to hear the message and see the speaker. [1]
- CFLA-FCAB affirms that protest and disagreement can take many forms including picketing, requesting an item be removed from the collection, attending an event and asking questions of the speaker, or hosting a different event where an alternative perspective is presented, to name a few.
- CFLA-FCAB affirms that physical or verbal protest that interferes with an individual's ability to easily participate in an event, listen to a speaker, access a resource, or view content, or that creates an intimidating or hostile environment for users, attendees or speakers, is unacceptable. These types of protest substantially interfere with the ability to communicate an idea and a participant's ability to listen, view or read.

Some Considerations for Library Administrators:



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- Establish clear policies and procedures related to Library Use, Reconsideration of Library Materials and Programs, Meeting Room Management, Customer Conduct and Safety and Security.
- Be prepared to respond to inquiries related to materials purchased for library collections as well as provide talking points to library staff.
- If a protest is anticipated, communicate with leaders of protest group(s) and/or individual protester(s) ahead of time, setting a clear expectation for civil discourse and peaceful behaviour.
- Help protect the public and a speaker by ensuring a senior staff member is present at library events anticipated to be controversial and by increasing staff coverage to assist attendees.
- Controversy is not always easy to anticipate and not all events anticipated to be controversial result in protest or dissent. Establish relationships and connections with community organizations and law enforcement to help libraries better manage difficult situations. While the library can make policies, practices and expectations clear, can work with protesters to address concerns, and can ask individuals or groups to leave if they are disruptive on library property or in a space the library has rented, it is not the library's responsibility to control or manage the behaviour of protesters – particularly if they are protesting outside of library spaces.

References

1. "Guidelines for Event Organizers, Participants and Protesters: Freedom of Expression, Protest and Dissent." McMaster University, Adhoc Committee on Protest and Freedom of Expression. February 15, 2018.
<https://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/02/Guidelines-for-Event-Organizers-DRAFT-February-2018.pdf>. (Accessed June, 2020.)

Related Resources:

CFLA FCAB Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries:

<http://cfla-fcab.ca/en/guidelines-and-position-papers/statement-on-intellectual-freedom-and-libraries/>

CFLA FCAB Position Statement on Diversity and Inclusion:

<http://cfla-fcab.ca/en/guidelines-and-position-papers/position-statement-on-diversity-and-inclusion/>

CARL ABRC Code of Conduct:

<http://www.carl-abrc.ca/mini-site-page/advancing-open/code-of-conduct/>

American Library Association. Responding to and Preparing for Controversial Programs and Speakers Q&A

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/controversialprogramsqa#Dealing%20with%20protesters%20and%20speakers>



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[1] McMaster University. "Guidelines for Event Organizers, Participants and Protesters: Freedom of Expression, Protest and Dissent." McMaster University, Adhoc Committee on Protest and Freedom of Expression. February 15, 2018.
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