

Professional Ethics Training

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Professional Ethics

at Salt Lake County Library

This training will introduce you to the Professional Ethics followed by employees of the County Library.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain what ethics are and how they apply in professional situations.
- Recognize our three major Professional Ethics or Core Values.
- Apply our Core Values to situations you encounter in your work at the library.



What are Ethics?

Ethics are guideposts for human behavior, whether acting in groups or as individuals. Ethics are secular (separate from religion) standards of right and wrong summarized in principles.

Workplace ethics include government service standards, professional expectations, interpersonal boundaries, and behavioral limits that reflect on the individual AND the group.



General Ethics

The easiest way to think about ethics or to explore ethical guidelines is to ask yourself:

“What if everybody did it?”

Ethics require our individual judgment as we encounter situations in our daily lives.



Professional Ethics for Library Workers

Professional ethics are organizational guidelines for our collective behavior when performing a job. Attorney-client privilege is a legal ethic. Doctor-patient privilege is a medical ethic. Library workers have a set of professional ethics, too.

Guiding Documents – American Libraries

The professional guiding organization of libraries in the United States is the American Library Association (ALA).

The **ALA Library Bill of Rights** is our foremost professional guiding document.

Read the Library Bill of Rights to the right before proceeding to the next slide—you'll need to use the scroll bar to scroll down to see all of the text. This document is located at ala.org.



Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

I. 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

... ..

ALA Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- I. 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.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.
- VII. All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.

Adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; January 29, 2019.

Inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996.

Although the Articles of the *Library Bill of Rights* are unambiguous statements of basic principles that should govern the service of all libraries, questions do arise concerning application of these principles to specific library practices. See the documents designated by the Intellectual Freedom Committee as [Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights](#).

Guiding Documents – Salt Lake County Library

The Salt Lake County Library also has guiding documents, beginning with our mission statement:

Make a positive difference in the lives of our community by inspiring imagination, satisfying curiosity and providing a great place for everyone to visit.



Guiding Documents – Library Policies & Procedures

All library policy statements (material selection, patron privacy, internet access, room use, etc.) reflect our professional ethics as an organization.

- You can find library policies on the [Policies and Guidelines page](#) of the library's website. These documents are available to the public.
- Our [eManuals](#) include numerous policies and procedures that you'll learn over time. These documents are for staff use (not publicly available). The eManuals can be accessed from the Staff Portal, and you can bookmark them for quick access.



General Ethical Principles

Following professional ethics is not just knowing and applying rules but understanding *why* we have these rules.

Library workers:

- Have compassion and respect for patrons and fellow staff.
- Use professional ethics to guide individual judgment in diverse situations.
- Take pride in the Public Library as a vital institution in our community.



Our Professional Ethics (aka Core Values)

- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Equal Access and Service
- Intellectual Freedom

These ethics are sometimes referred to as Core Values or Library Values.



Professional Ethics in Practice

A basic guideline for thinking and acting ethically is demonstrated by a simple phrase you can memorize and repeat to yourself:

What if everybody did it?

You are one person, but what if everybody:

- Loudly repeated your phone number or email address in public.
- Removed library books they didn't like.
- Gave preference to friends for use of library resources.
- Refused service to unhoused people.
- Blocked physical access to those with disabilities.
- Gave a family member or neighbor information about your library account.

Professional Ethics in Practice

Those were just a few examples of daily ethical considerations we face in a public library. Now we will go through some examples of each core value in action.

- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Equal Access and Service
- Intellectual Freedom





Professional Ethics in Practice: Privacy and Confidentiality

Professional Ethics in Practice: Privacy and Confidentiality

When a visitor enters the Salt Lake County Library, they are granted the expectation that what they read, watch, or listen to will not be recorded, commented on, or shared. Privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, free thought, and free association, and all people possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use, whether they are children or adults, or library card holders or visitors.

If patrons fear their library use is not private and confidential, their freedom has been compromised.



Professional Ethics in Practice: Privacy and Confidentiality

Where Can You Find Our Policies on Privacy and Confidentiality?

The [Policies and Guidelines page](#) of the library's website includes our [Patron Information Confidentiality Policy](#). Click the link to read this document now (it's short!). This policy is available to the public and can be shared with patrons if they ask you questions about our privacy policies.

Our **eManuals** also include information for staff about privacy and confidentiality.

Professional Ethics in Practice: Privacy and Confidentiality

What is confidential?

- Personally identifiable information
- Information asked for or received by patrons
- Materials requested or borrowed
- Digital transactions or searches
- Library records (reading history, use of resources, services, programs, or facilities)
- Records of incidents or complaints that happened within or against the library



Professional Ethics in Practice: Privacy and Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality at public libraries is not only part of our professional ethics, *it's the law!*

- Utah State Law recognizes library records separately from other records. A court order is required by law enforcement when seeking library information about an individual, such as their check out history.
- Security camera footage is confidential. Staff should not access footage without a legitimate reason. Law enforcement officers may be allowed to view live or recorded footage with staff oversight, but may not record or keep footage without a court order.



Professional Ethics in Practice: Privacy and Confidentiality

- Privacy and confidentiality policies apply to all patrons *AND* staff.
- Respect privacy boundaries between individual patrons, even if related to one another.
- Maintain confidentiality of patron use of library resources and requests of information from staff.



Privacy and Confidentiality: Practical Examples

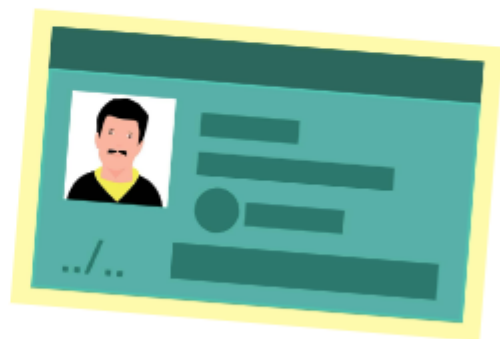
How do you think privacy and confidentiality might play a role in *your* work at the County Library? Click the boxes below to see examples.

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

At Customer Service and Information desks, requiring ID to access an account without a library card is vital to ensuring patron trust in the security of their records. But often individual patrons think it is not important for *THEIR ID* to be produced. When someone just wants to blurt out their memorized card number, they can be impatient with our rules. It's in these moments of discomfort that we must behave ethically to protect ALL patrons. Practice explaining privacy and security in a short and simple statement. When we are consistent (or inconsistent!) in our professional behavior and language, patrons notice.



Examples 2 & 3

IT provides critical support for patron privacy and confidentiality in their maintenance of our public internet access computers. They must implement ways to “wash” each station after use, and to make sure digital fingerprints are not left on the desktop. This makes it so a patron who uses a computer after another patron can’t see what websites that person visited or access any documents they may have saved on the computer. While they may never interact directly with the public, their work effects patrons on a daily basis. Thank you, IT!

What happens if one of your coworkers relocates to another branch, and a patron realizes they haven’t seen the employee in a while and asks you what happened to them? It might feel natural to let them know what branch they’re now working at, but unless your coworker said you could share this information, you should not tell the patron which branch they are now working at. Protecting privacy and personal information extends to both our patrons AND our fellow library staff.

Professional Ethics in Practice: Privacy and Confidentiality

Leading by example, protecting yourself!

Sometimes patrons ask personal questions, or we feel inclined to share something to put a patron at ease. *We should be very cautious in these moments so we don't set an example that leads to both staff and patrons losing privacy.*

We are often in public spaces, and our voices carry. If you do not want everyone to know something, it is best to keep it to yourself. It is also the professional choice. Learn to say "I don't discuss my personal life (or beliefs or politics or age or family, etc.) at work, but *what library resources can I connect you with today?*"

Even though it might feel unnatural at first (because who doesn't like to talk about themselves!?), maintaining a *professional, neutral but helpful demeanor* will increase respect for our work. This respect comes in handy when policies must be enforced equally, and those we are "friendly" with feel they deserve special treatment.



Professional Ethics in Practice: Equal Access and Service

Professional Ethics in Practice: Equal Access and Service

All people are welcome.
All are treated equally.
No barriers to service.

We are not here to judge people's worthiness of service nor the correctness of their points of view. We are here to provide equal access to materials and services. This is the essence of professional behavior.

An abstract background featuring a vibrant, multi-colored paint splatter in shades of blue, green, yellow, and red. Overlaid on this is a semi-transparent white rectangular box containing text.

Diversity is a fact.
Equity is a choice.
Inclusion is an
action.
Belonging is an
outcome.

- Arthur Chan

Professional Ethics in Practice: Equal Access and Service

- Libraries should not block access to materials or services based on any form of identity (age, ability, origin, gender, views, etc.).
- Libraries should not create socio-economic or cultural barriers to accessing materials and services.
- Libraries should not privilege any viewpoint. All people should feel welcome in our buildings and be reflected in our staff, materials, displays, and services.



Professional Ethics in Practice: Equal Access and Service

Equal access/services principles should be embedded in everything we do: issuing cards, creating use policies, organizing and maintaining our spaces, providing technological resources, selecting and managing materials, making displays, hiring, etc.



Día de Muertos / Day of the Dead display at Kearns Library in October 2022.

Professional Ethics in Practice: Equal Access and Service

Each patron you assist in person, on the phone, or via electronic means is equal and deserves equitable attention, services, and resources.

Even if you do not serve patrons directly, your work still affects them.
Every staff member impacts the patron experience.



Equal Access and Service: Practical Examples

Consider the ways your decisions and choices impact your co-workers and the patrons we serve. Click the boxes below to see examples.

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Our custodians set the same standards of cleanliness for areas designed for kids, teens, and adults. They do not think “kids don’t notice dust” or “teenagers are messy” and just attend to adult areas. This is a form of equal service that’s appreciated by all.



Examples 2 & 3

Managers schedule staff at public service desks. They consider unknown factors affecting staffing levels. Will it be busy? Do we need a sub? They must balance fiscal responsibility, staff needs, and patron needs, but know it is important that *evening and weekend visitors do not feel shortchanged or underserved*. Patrons notice these things. Scheduling so that staff can provide equal service because they have adequate time and support is critical and ethical.

Marketing must consider many factors when creating publicity promoting our services. Literacy levels, aging eyes, sensory processing variations, diverse representation in photos, etc. These decisions all involve ethics!

Equal Access and Service: Practical Examples

Consider the ways your decisions and choices impact your co-workers and the patrons we serve. Click the boxes below to see examples.

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

We ensure our facilities, resources, and programs are accessible to all members of our community. This includes things like making sure aisles are wide enough to safely navigate wheelchairs, and providing American Sign Language interpreters when requested at programs. This is not only the ethical thing to do, it is also a legal requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



Professional Ethics in Practice: Equal Access and Service

BEST PRACTICE:

If you cannot do something for all, reflect on whether you should do something for one person. If you would not treat everyone in a similar manner, do not treat one person differently. This is how we maintain equal and equitable service.

Use your best judgement. For example, you should not waive a fine just because a friend asks, but you CAN reduce a fine for any patron if it is appropriate service. You might not leave the information desk to retrieve items from a shelf for everyone, but you should extend a hand to a person with a disability to reach items on high shelves.

THE PLATINUM RULE:

Treat others the way they wish to be treated.

Professional Ethics in Practice: Intellectual Freedom



Professional Ethics in Practice: Intellectual Freedom

Intellectual Freedom Principles

- Relevant library policies include [materials selection](#), [display](#), and [reconsideration of materials and services](#).
- All points of view should be considered in collections and displays.
- Programming should reflect core values but not advocate a particular point of view.
- No censorship of materials.
- Patrons make their own choices of materials.

Professional Ethics in Practice: Intellectual Freedom

Why do most people visit the library? Resources, aka THE STUFF! Books, DVDs, magazines, newspapers, technology, but also databases, Internet access, community information, and knowledgeable staff.

Libraries are ethically obligated to provide communities of users with many points of view. The professional term for this is **Intellectual Freedom**. The concept is underpinned by the US Constitution and Bill of Rights.

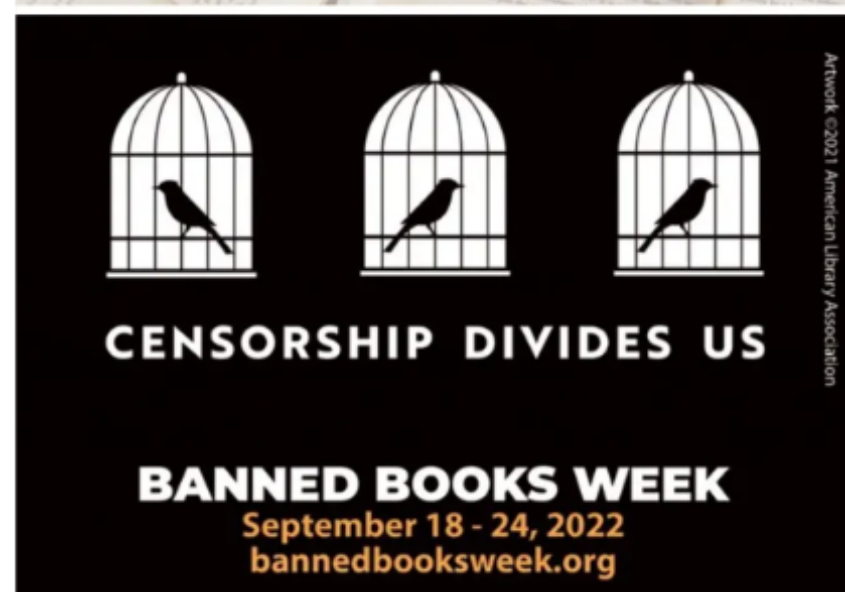
Library patrons are free to read, watch, and listen to whichever materials they choose. Each patron makes their own decisions and may not take away choices from others. Library workers do not judge or comment upon patron choices.



Professional Ethics in Practice: Intellectual Freedom

Intellectual Freedom is bolstered by the principle of no censorship. Censorship is a decision made by a governing authority to suppress, exclude, expurgate, remove, or restrict public access to a library resource based on personal or group disapproval of its content or its author/creator.

Occasionally patrons may challenge a book in our collection that they don't agree with. They may want the book removed or moved to a different section. If you work with the public, you'll want to take some time to get familiar with our [Reconsideration of Materials and Services Policy](#) and where to find it.



Professional Ethics in Practice: Intellectual Freedom

- Material Selection, Collection Management, and Collection Promotion are at the very heart of the library's embrace of Intellectual Freedom.
- A democratic, self-governing society requires well-informed residents. To be well-informed means to be able to understand and evaluate all points of view. Information literacy requires access to diverse resources. Information should be accurate (when factual), well-reviewed, and current.
- Selection and promotion of diverse materials, services, and resources for all ages is critical to this mission.



Intellectual Freedom: Practical Examples

How do you think intellectual freedom might play a role in the work we do at the County Library? Click the boxes below to see examples.

Example 1

Programming and displays provide opportunities for patrons to explore many topics. Displays and shelf presentation should be inviting, reflective of the diversity of our communities, and designed with the purpose of expanding patron knowledge and offering wide choices.

Example 2

Example 3



Diwali program at West Valley in 2022.

Examples 2 & 3

Displays can increase patron awareness of Library programs, resources, and services, but are not intended to advocate a singular point of view beyond freedom to read, view, and listen. Staff should be aware of their own biases, likes and dislikes, and be mindful to create displays representing many viewpoints and topics.



Freedom to Read display at Onondaga County Public Library System in Syracuse, NY.

When purchasing books, staff must be careful to select a wide variety of topics and viewpoints, rather than only books that interest them. We do not want to censor our materials through our purchasing.

Likewise, if a patron complains that a book is obscene and needs to be removed, we would not immediately remove the book. To avoid censoring, we would explain our reconsideration policy and show how to submit a reconsideration request using the online form (if they choose to do so).

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Library Core Values embrace the principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Each patron has an equal right to access and service, and our institution celebrates a diversity of points of view and experiences. Libraries should be inclusive spaces where all *feel welcome and reflected*.

As professional library workers, regardless of our titles, we recognize the validity of differing perspectives and show respect to all. We practice providing equal access and service. We understand that equity takes differences into account to ensure fairness. If we cannot speak the language of a patron, no amount of “equal service” is equitable service. *We find ways to help.*

Equal service is not a formula. It is not “I spend exactly 2 minutes with each patron.” Instead, it is *“I am equally willing to spend whatever time is needed to provide each patron what they requested.”*



Image Source: Hafuboti

How do Professional Ethics connect specifically to your position at the library?

Take a moment to think about this question, then click this box to see situations where ethics play a role.

Professional Ethics play a role in all of these situations...

- A neighbor wants an additional renewal for an item with a wait list.
- A husband wants to know what's due on his wife's card.
- A regular patron wants to have an extra couple of hours in a study room.
- A patron wants to know if someone in their book club has the needed book checked out.
- A patron wants tax or medical advice (not information!).
- A patron wants you to eject teens from a computer "because they are just playing games, and I have work due."
- A patron is unkempt and other patrons are asking to remove them since their appearance makes them uncomfortable.
- You find a wallet in the trash can you are emptying.
- You find a medical bill with personal information in the book you are shelving.
- A patron follows you through the library asking personal questions.

Our Mission as Library Workers

Public Libraries in the United States are unique spaces that allow communities to learn, bond, and grow together, even when they disagree as individuals.

The Public Library is a place of respect, and practicing professional ethics helps staff members develop respect for this important civic institution and for all people in our community.

Be a proud practitioner of Library Core Values!



Conclusion

- We encourage free, unrestricted use of library materials and services that provide wide access to a world of information and opinion—this is the basic principle at the heart of Library policy. Every employee participates in the creation and promotion of a robust, inclusive, safe, free public library through the wide variety of work we all do. We acknowledge our responsibilities, the guidelines we use, and take pride in explaining them to the public, as ***we do this for them***.
- We take responsibility for our actions and choices, we protect patron rights, we maintain a welcoming environment for the benefit of all, and we are willing to have difficult conversations with both patrons and fellow employees.
- Our demeanor is kind and compassionate, but unwavering in our dedication to Library Core Values.

Resources

[ALA Library Bill of Rights](#)

[ALA Code of Ethics](#)

[County Library Mission Statement](#)

[County Library Policies](#)

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