



FAIR in Libraries Neutrality & Viewpoint Diversity Toolkit

FAIR in Libraries' mission is to promote and defend the core library principles of neutrality, viewpoint diversity, intellectual freedom, and free speech. This toolkit will empower citizens with the information and strategies needed to ensure their library respects and upholds intellectual freedom and free speech by offering books and services that are unbiased and include many different points of view.

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Library Neutrality & Diversity: Resources for Library Users, Parents & Educators

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I. Part One

A. Primer: Introduction to Neutrality

1. Neutrality Defined

A major challenge in the debate over neutrality is that it was not defined by the American Library Association (ALA), and not included in their [1939 Library Bill of Rights](#). The [Association of Library Professionals \(ALP\)](#) in 2023 defined neutrality as including:

- *value neutrality* - not imposing personal values of library workers onto users
- *stakeholder neutrality* - not prioritizing one group over another
- *process neutrality* - consistently applying transparent and fair procedures
- *goal neutrality* - allowing users to use library materials as they see fit

2. Neutrality as a Core Value

All principles in the ALA Library Bill of Rights affirm neutrality as a core professional value and, as stated in the [International Federation of Library Associations \(IFLA\) Code of Ethics for Librarians](#):

Librarians and other information workers are strictly committed to neutrality and an unbiased stance regarding collection, access and service. Neutrality results in the most balanced collection and the most balanced access to information achievable.

A library can only serve all members of the community when it is a trusted institution. The best way to earn this trust is by respecting community members' sincerely-held beliefs by not taking sides on issues and remaining neutral.

3. Employee Neutrality

The [IFLA Code](#) states that:

Librarians and other information workers distinguish between their personal convictions and professional duties. They do not advance private interests or personal beliefs at the expense of neutrality.

Unfortunately, many librarians no longer believe in neutrality and actively work to move their library in a political or ideological direction. These activist librarians use their positions to purchase books and run programs supporting their own beliefs and prevent the purchase of books or the running of programs challenging these beliefs. This pre-censorship results in unbalanced collections and programs that don't include the many possible sides of an issue.

4. Institutional Neutrality

Just as library employees must remain neutral to ensure balanced collections and programs, the library as an institution must also remain neutral. Institutional neutrality means the library does not advocate for, or take an official position on, political, cultural, or ideological issues. Institutional neutrality also means the library is committed to ensuring that its collections and services reflect the diverse viewpoints of the community it serves.

5. The Relationship Between Neutrality and Intellectual Freedom

Without neutrality, library collections offer only limited viewpoints and this restricts readers' intellectual freedom. Only libraries that remain neutral create the conditions allowing all library users to exercise their intellectual freedom.

B. Checking for Neutrality

1. Your Library's Statements

Reading your library's mission, vision, values and intellectual freedom statements is a good way to check for library neutrality. These statements should be available on the library's website. If you can't find them, ask library staff to provide them.

Mission statements vary depending on the type of library. School and college libraries focus on students and learning while public libraries focus on the needs of their community's residents so their statements will be different. But despite their differences, all libraries have a core mission to support access to information, and to promote literacy and learning. When mission statements go beyond core library principals, this often indicates a library is moving into activism and not remaining neutral. For example, a library mission statement emphasizing equal access to information is neutral while one emphasizing social justice or DEI is not neutral because advancing social change is not part of a library's mission.

2. Your Library's Policies

Library policies on collection development, programming, displays, social media, room rentals, and partnerships have a direct impact on neutrality. These policies are usually intended to maintain neutrality so it's important to understand them if you want to challenge a library for being biased. Policies should be available on the library's website. If you can't find them, ask library staff to provide them.

Neutrality extends beyond formal library statements. It also requires library employees to respect and follow library policies so neutrality is maintained in collections and services. For example, a

library might appear to be neutral by not making official statements supporting anti-racism but then shows bias by hosting systemic racism and white privilege seminars and purchasing many books on these topics, while offering no seminars or books challenging the ideology. In this example, staff are not following the collection development and programming policies resulting in collections and programs that are biased and not neutral.

Once you understand the core value of library neutrality and have identified a lack of neutrality in your library, there are several strategies you can use to ensure neutrality.

C. Ensuring Neutrality

1. Speak to Library Staff and Board Members

a. Library Staff

If you feel your library is not remaining neutral on an issue, you can speak about this with library staff and board members. Most library staff want to do the right thing so telling them about your concerns in a friendly manner is a good way to start. Front line staff will likely refer you to their supervisor or the library director so make sure you have facts and concrete examples of bias and that you understand library policy (Toolkit 1.1). Ask the library director to bring your concerns to the library board and follow up with the director after the next board meeting.

b. Senior Staff and Board Members

If you feel your concerns are not being addressed by library staff, you can escalate your concerns to the next level. In school libraries, this would typically be the principal or school board, while at college libraries, this would typically be the academic vice-president (provost).

If staff at a public library don't respond, you can take your concerns directly to the library board; the board is responsible for governing the library by developing policies, budgets and strategic plans. Public library board members are usually volunteer residents appointed by your local council. There are several ways to alert the library board to your concerns:

1. **Email the library board chair.** The chair's email address should be on the library's website or staff can provide it.

2. **Meet with the library board chair.** Set up a phone, video or in-person meeting to discuss your concerns. These types of meetings are most easily arranged by email using the board chair's address on the website. The board chair's phone number is not usually public but you can give staff your phone number so they can pass it along to the chair.
3. **Speak at the library board meeting.** Public library board meetings are open to the public and you can apply to speak at the meeting. Speakers (often called delegations) usually have to register in advance by contacting library staff, often several days before the meeting, to get on the meeting agenda. Keep your remarks brief (around 3-5 minutes), focus on solutions, and respect the board's meeting procedures which should be provided when you register.

2. Speak to Government Representatives

If library staff, senior administrators or board members are unresponsive to your concerns, you can speak to your local government representative. Public libraries typically get most of their funding from local governments so that's a good place to start and you can escalate to regional, state or provincial government levels if local government or school administrators are unresponsive.

3. Serve on the Public Library Board

Most public libraries are governed by a volunteer citizen board appointed by the local council for the same term as the council. If you love libraries and have the time, you can apply to volunteer for the board to have a say on library policy and direction.

Library boards develop and monitor the library's budget, policy and strategic direction so need members with many skills including financial, legal, planning, fundraising, education, human resources and building design/construction/maintenance. The library or local council advertises for volunteers and lets the public know the skills needed for the upcoming term.

The library director reports directly to the board and all staff report to the director. Board members have direct influence on policy, strategic direction and budget but only indirect influence on operations. The board ensures the library meets the community's needs and is not influenced by political agendas. The library board protects intellectual freedom by ensuring the library remains neutral, viewpoint diverse and responsive to the community.

II. Part Two

A. Primer: Introduction to Viewpoint Diversity

1. Core Value

Everyone has unique experiences that form their understanding of the world. Different views and opinions are important to a well-functioning society. Without viewpoint diversity, people can't fully understand complex issues and make informed decisions.

Viewpoint diversity is also a core library value and the key to achieving library neutrality. The [Library Bill of Rights from the American Library Association](#) directs U.S. libraries to:

... provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be ... removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

The [Canadian Federation of Library Association's Statement on Intellectual Freedom](#) affirms Canadian libraries have:

... a core responsibility to safeguard and facilitate access to constitutionally protected expressions of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, including those which some individuals and groups consider unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable.

2. Diverse Collections

No library has the space or money to buy books on every side of every topic but libraries must strive to include as many viewpoints as possible, especially on controversial topics. Libraries should offer many perspectives and allow readers to make up their own minds.

Important issues such as climate change, mass migration, race, and gender are often represented in a one-sided way in many library collections. Books questioning mainstream views are often dismissed as “misinformation” or “hate” and not purchased. Authors writing on unpopular or “controversial” sides of topics are smeared as bigots and their books excluded.

3. Diverse Programs

Viewpoint diversity in library programs is also important and requires libraries to offer a range of speakers and topics. In addition to running their own programs, most libraries offer meeting space for outside groups to hold public events and programs. Library staff are not permitted to deny meeting space if they personally disapprove of the group or event. Library staff should also prevent the intimidation of speakers with heckling and other forms of harassment by those who disapprove of the event.

By presenting multiple viewpoints in collections and programs, libraries uphold their role as neutral, viewpoint diverse, trusted spaces for learning and community engagement.

B. Checking for Viewpoint Diversity

1. Your Library's Catalogue

A good way to check for viewpoint diversity is to pick a topic and search your library's catalogue to see if the results include titles examining different aspects of the topic. For example, a search for books about climate change at a library with viewpoint diversity might include titles offering worst-case scenarios like journalist David Wallace-Wells's *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, as well as books offering different scenarios like *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn't, and Why It Matters* by climate scientist Steven E. Koonin.

2. Your Library's Programs

The easiest way to see how diverse your library's programs are is to look at the event calendar. The event calendar should be on the library's website and the event or program titles and descriptions give a good idea of topics covered and points of view offered.

3. Your Library's Policies

Looking at your library's policies is another good way to check for viewpoint diversity. A library's collection development policy is the most important one when it comes to viewpoint diversity. Your library's collection development policy should include a version of the following statement:

The collections shall be balanced and represent diverse points of view and may include materials that some members of the public consider to be controversial.

Library policies on room rentals, programs and request-for-purchase also have an impact on viewpoint diversity. These policies are usually intended to protect viewpoint diversity so it's important to understand them if you want to challenge a library for being biased and not offering multiple viewpoints. These policies are usually available on the library's website. If you can't find these policies, ask library staff to provide them.

C. Ensuring Viewpoint Diversity

1. Your Library's Policies and Procedures

Your library's collection development, request-for-purchase, programming and room rentals policies directly impact viewpoint diversity. While these policies are usually written to ensure viewpoint diversity, staff members who disagree with this concept often find ways to work around policy. For this reason, it's important to know what the policies say if you want to successfully challenge what you feel is a lack of diversity in your local library.

If you find your library is not offering diverse viewpoints there are library procedures you can use to increase viewpoint diversity.

2. Request for Purchase

Public libraries welcome requests for purchase to help build a collection that serves the needs of its community. School libraries aren't as open to book requests because they have limited space and include mainly books that support classroom lessons. The following are steps to request a title you'd like your public library to add to its collection:

- a. **Select a book.** You may notice a book is missing from your library, or that most books on a topic have the same viewpoint. If you can't think of a particular title, try the *Library Watchers of Greater Lowell* (Massachusetts) suggestions: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61556735437296>.
- b. **Request the book.** Public libraries usually have request-for-purchase forms on their website. These forms often require you to provide reasons for purchasing the book. This is a good opportunity to explain that you're suggesting the book because this point of view is missing and quote from the library's collection development policy requiring viewpoint diversity. The section you need uses wording like the following:

The collections shall be balanced and represent diverse points of view and may include materials that some members of the public consider to be controversial.
- c. **Wait one month.** Usually the library purchases books on a schedule and in batches. Sometimes a library will not respond to your request, but will purchase the book. Other times, you'll get a response. Often, the library will put the requested book on hold for you. Occasionally, there will be a good reason the library can't purchase the book and occasionally, a reason you may find unconvincing.
- d. **If the book has not arrived,** request a different book on the same topic. Encourage other people in your community to follow your example. The more requests the library gets, the more likely it will buy the book.

- e. **Document all your requests.** If the library refuses to fulfill your requests for an extended period (6 months or more), you can make this problem public. Start by speaking to the library's governing board, or the local governing body as described in toolkit Part I, section A., page 4, *Speaking to Library Staff and Board Members*). Write about it for your local paper. Share your story as broadly as you can.

3. Donations

Another strategy to ensure diverse viewpoints, especially if your request-for-purchase is refused, is to buy the book yourself and donate it. Libraries don't usually accept donations of older books or books in poor condition, while some libraries won't accept even new books because of the extra cost to process and catalogue the item. Check your library's donation policy before buying a donation to increase the odds it will be accepted and to challenge the library if it's rejected.

If your donation meets all policy criteria and is still rejected, it's important to ask the library why. Staff usually know they can't refuse a donation just because they personally dislike the book's message, so may try to use legitimate policy reasons or reasons not found in their policies. This is why it's important you know the library's donation policy. If the reason for rejection does not follow policy, you should tell staff politely and offer them a chance to accept it. If the donation is still refused, take it to the library board as described in toolkit Part I, section A, Page 4, *Speaking to Library Staff and Board Members*, page 4.

4. Speaker Requests

Programs are an important part of the services a library offers their community because programs present information in a practical way and connect people by offering them a chance to ask questions and exchange ideas. For this reason, it's important the programs libraries offer include many different points of view.

If you review your library's event calendar and notice a bias towards certain viewpoints and a lack of other viewpoints, you can request a speaker much the same way you request a book. Public libraries are committed to making meeting rooms available for third-party bookings so another strategy is to approach an organization and suggest they bring a speaker and request a room booking for a public event.

III. Part Three

A. FAIR's Model Library Neutrality & Viewpoint Diversity Statement

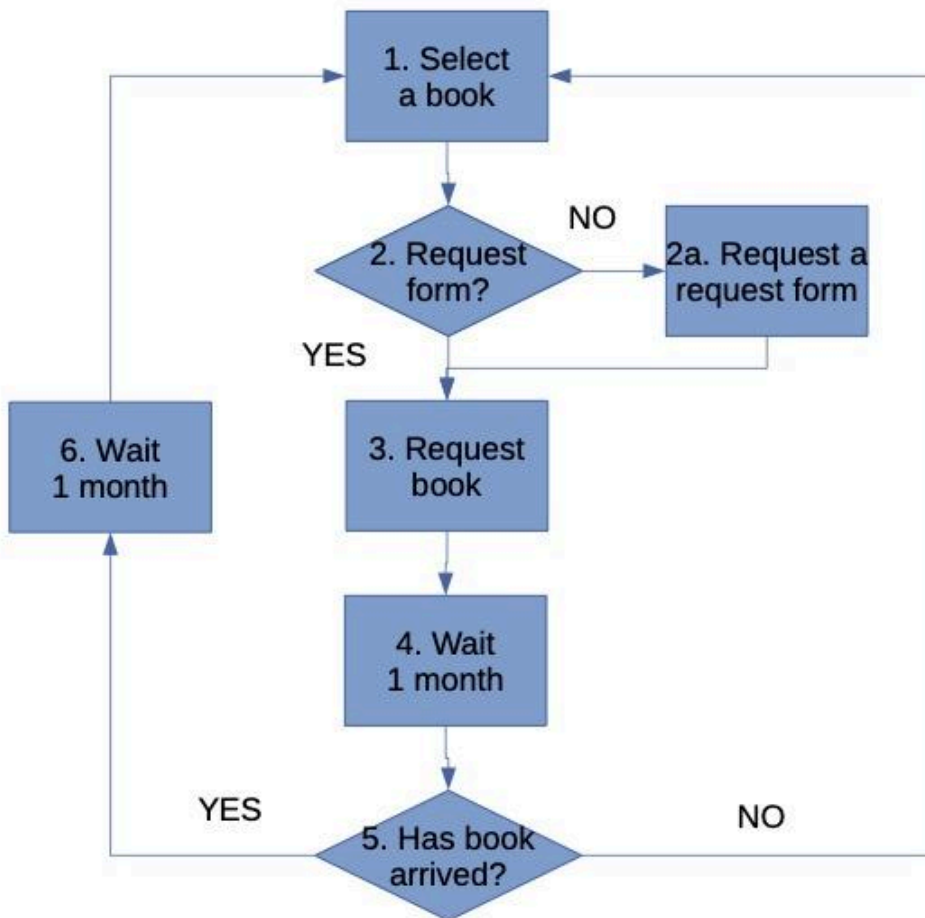
The library is committed to intellectual freedom, viewpoint diversity, and equal respect for all individuals. As a public institution, it provides access to a broad range of ideas, perspectives, and cultural expressions so community members can explore issues independently and form their own informed views. Inclusion of materials or programs does not constitute endorsement by the library.

Consistent with principles of free expression and pluralism, the library seeks to represent varied viewpoints across civic, cultural, historical, and educational topics. Collection and programming decisions are guided by professional standards, community interests, and the goal of fostering informed dialogue rather than political, ideological, or identity-based preferences.

The library also supports age-appropriate access to materials while maintaining its commitment to demonstrated intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity.

By supporting open inquiry, civil discourse, and shared access to knowledge, the library aims to serve the entire community while affirming the intellectual autonomy of each individual and encouraging thoughtful engagement across differences.

B. Book Request Flowchart



C. Sample Book Request

**ROLLA PUBLIC LIBRARY
ITEM REQUEST FORM**

*Please allow up to 4 weeks for fulfillment. Call 573-364-2604 to check on request status.
(Circle your request type below)*

Inter-Library Loan Purchase Suggestion Either

Date: _____ Staff Initials: _____

Patron Name: _____

Phone#: _____

Title: _____

Author: _____

Series: _____ # _____ of _____

Format: *(circle one)* Regular Print; Large Print; DVD; BLU-RAY; CD; _____

Publication Date: _____

Comments: _____

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