

Basic Policies for Public Libraries

Circulation

A circulation policy provides all of the requirements for borrowing materials from the library's collection.

- Requirements for a borrower's card – age, residency, proof of identification, address, parental consent.
- Temporary cards.
- Length of loan periods for different materials, penalties for non-compliance.
- Confidentiality of Library Records Law.
- Any restrictions on children's borrowing – R-rated videos, adult books.
- Rules for reserves, interlibrary loan.
- Financial responsibility accepted by borrowers.

Computer and Internet Use

The computer use policy states who may use the library's computers, who may access the internet, and what conditions exist. There are frequently some restrictions that apply to use by children. The Library's position on filtering software is included. Some common components might be:

- Children are not allowed to enter chat rooms for their own safety.
- All children must read the policy on safe surfing before using the internet.
- Staff will assist users, but not provide instruction in specific software use.
- Penalty for accessing pornographic sites.
- May customers bring their own disks to use with library computers?

Emergencies

The emergencies policy explains what the library will do to assure the safety of customers during various kinds of emergency

- Tornado – to which safe area of the library (back hall, basement) will customers be taken. No unaccompanied children will be allowed to leave the building.
- Fire – all staff and customers must evacuate the building immediately when the fire alarm sounds. Staff in each library area (reference, adult stacks, children's . . .) will direct customers to the nearest fire exit.
- Bomb threat – Staff will immediately call the Police and allow them to decide if the building is to be evacuated.

Exhibits

If the library has bulletin boards or exhibit cases which the public is allowed to use, develop a policy on what may be exhibited. Be sure that the criteria are spelled out. Do not leave the decision entirely to the Director or the Board's discretion. Such decisions should not be made solely on the personal tastes of the Board members and Director. Include a section on distribution of free literature. Common components include:

- What exhibit cases or bulletin boards or racks are available?
- Free pamphlets and literature.

- Political campaigns.
- Private collections:
 - Limit on how often per year.
 - Limits on size of collection – both the size of the items and the total size of the collection.
 - Library's insurance does/does not cover so a waiver is/is not required.
 - Who sets up and takes down.
 - Physical security available to protect the collection.

Materials Selection or Collection Development

- Will be discussed in Collection Development class.

Meeting Rooms

A meeting room policy states who may use the meeting room and under what conditions. It describes the meeting rooms available and what furniture and equipment is available. It states what the library will provide, such as janitor service, and what is expected of the users. It usually contains these components:

- Any charges for use of the meeting room.
- Whether closed meetings, such as private baby showers, may be held.
- What kind of supervision is required for children's groups?
- Whether anything can be sold at meetings – such as financial planning materials.
- Whether political rallies or church services can be held.
- That groups with unpopular ideas or beliefs may use the rooms.
- Limits on the number of times a group may use the room.
- Penalties for misuse of the room.
- Whether refreshments are allowed
- Library programs take precedence over others.
- Room must be left as it was found.

Personnel

The personnel policy assures that all employees are treated fairly. Some common components:

- Who gets to attend library conferences?
- How travel funds are allocated.
- How continuing education funds are allocated.
- How are internal committee members chosen?
- How internal promotions are handled.

Reference

A reference policy explains the legal and ethical principles that must be observed by the staff when conducting a reference interview. Common components include:

- The library is committed to the principle that citizens of a free country have a right to any information in the library. The staff will not indicate by word or deed any negative reaction to the customer's request.

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- The library staff will attempt to provide full and accurate information to anyone without questioning their need, purpose, or use of such information.
- The staff recognizes the customer's right to privacy in discussing his information needs.
- The library recognizes that only persons appropriately licensed by the State may dispense legal or medical advice and therefore staff will refrain from doing so

Required Library Behavior

This policy describes what behaviors are expected of customers and what is prohibited. It is unnecessary to describe prohibited acts which would be a crime wherever they occurred – such as indecent exposure, selling drugs. Extreme caution is advised regarding anything involving appearance or hygiene. One man's obscene T-shirt is another's free political expression. Libraries have lost lawsuits when they threw out stinky patrons because there is no standard criteria for measuring foul body odor. Caution is also urged in writing a policy directed at just one person or small group. Common components might be:

- Customers are expected to speak quietly.
- The following activities are not allowed: smoking, running, shouting, playing a radio, sleeping, eating or drinking, talking on a cell phone, plugging in one's laptop to a library outlet, annoying other customers or staff by staring at them, following them around or trying to engage them in conversation when they have stated they are not interested.
- State the disciplinary action that will result from violation.

Safety of Children

This policy establishes the expectations that the library has for parents and caregivers of children using the library. It explains that libraries are not safe places for young children to be left unattended. It explains the library's role in guiding children's reading. Some common components may be:

- Advises parents and caregivers that the library will not restrict what any child may read, and that there are many items in the library unsuitable for children. Parental guidance is vital.
- The library staff will do their best to protect children but is aware that pedophiles come to libraries looking for unaccompanied children.
- Advises parents and caregivers that the police will take custody of unaccompanied young children or those still at the library at closing time.
- Disruptive children who came to the library on their own (walked, rode bikes) will be asked to leave. Disruptive children who are accompanied by parents/caregivers will be escorted to these persons who will be asked to monitor their child's behavior.