

CHAPTER ONE

What is a Library?

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Mission

The library's mission is to provide access to the world of information and ideas. In the past, that information was in manuscripts or books. Because the first libraries opened before the invention of the printing press and books were painstakingly copied out by hand, they were scarce and expensive. Libraries served as archives and chained these rare volumes to the tables.

Times have changed. We are inundated with information 24 hours a day. Libraries no longer need to serve as guardians of a scarce resource. The role of today's library is about community impact more than collections. Today's libraries are community centers and community builders connecting people to ideas, people to people and people to community. Libraries facilitate knowledge creation and are places of social engagement and learning. Today's library patrons should see opportunities to contribute and have a voice in the library. In the words of David Lankes "Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities."

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the federal agency that oversees federal funding for libraries in the United States, recognizes public libraries as providing, at a minimum:

- Organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof;
- Paid staff;
- Established schedule in which services of the staff are available to the public;
- Facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule; and
- Supported in whole or in part with public funds

The Maine Library Commission has expanded on the IMLS definition to also include:

- The library is either a town department or an organization with a governing board that has written bylaws, hires or appoints the library director and delegates to the director full responsibility for administering and managing the library, and ensures that library statistics and financial records are kept
- Creates and adheres to basic library policies
- Has a mission statement
- Is a member of the Maine Regional Library System
- The director plans, organizes, manages and directs a program of services that meets the needs of all members of the community

- The library director submits the Public Library Annual Report to the Maine State Library each year
- The facility complies with building, fire, safety, sanitation and other federal, state and local codes and legal requirements with at least one well maintained public restroom, the services of staff are available to the public year round for no less than 12 hours per week, has an exterior sign that clearly identifies the building as a library, has telephone service and a published telephone number, provides public internet access and offers designated public access computers and provides an up to date bibliographic card catalog or automated cataloged
- Offers regularly scheduled public programming such as story times, book clubs, etc.

Core Principles

Libraries across the world adhere to a set of core principles.

Access

All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users.

Confidentiality/Privacy

Protecting user privacy and confidentiality is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship. Maine Statute Title 27, Chapter 4-A, section 121 codifies the privacy and confidentiality of library patron records.

Democracy

A democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community the library serves.

Diversity

Value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve

Education and Lifelong Learning

Promote the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all.

Intellectual Freedom

Uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources- the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored. Intellectual freedom encompasses the freedom to hold, receive and disseminate ideas.

Censorship

The suppression of ideas and information that certain persons- individuals, groups or government officials – find objectionable or dangerous. The censor wants to prejudge materials for everyone. The United States Supreme Court has ruled that there are certain narrow categories of speech that are not protected by the First Amendment: obscenity, child pornography, defamation and “fighting words” or speech that incites immediate imminent lawless action. The government is also allowed to enforce secrecy of some information when it is considered essential to national security, like troop movements in time of war.

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble and to petition the government for redress of grievances.

The Public Good

Libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies.

Preservation

Preservation of information resources is central to libraries and librarianship

Service

We provide the highest level of service to all library users. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

The American Library Association (ALA) endorses the Library Bill of Rights, the Freedom to Read Statement, and the Freedom to View Statement. Copies of these statements are in the appendices. The core principles, embodied in the ALA documents, remain the foundation of libraries worldwide.

In addition to these principles, libraries must also adhere to federal and state laws such as copyright compliance, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the USA Patriot Act and the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

As a trustee and steward of the public trust, one of your duties is to ensure that your library adheres to these principles and follows federal, state and local laws.

Sources of Additional Information

- Lankes, David R. *Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today's Complex World*. San Bernardino, CA: R. David Lankes, 2012.
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<http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol22/iss1/16>.
- Maine Library Commission Definition of a Public Library
www.maine.gov/msl/libs/standards/definition.htm
- Legal Resources for Libraries
www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/legalresources.shtml
 - American's With Disabilities (ADA)
 - Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)
 - Copyright
 - Labor Laws
 - Maine Laws
 - Non Profit Corporations
 - Patriot Act
 - Service Dogs