

Challenge Response Checklist

Written by ARSL Advocacy Committee
Tuesday, February 21, 2023 11:13 AM

Facing down a material challenge can feel overwhelming. Patrons who approach library staff with concerns about a book they've found on your shelves often want immediate action to be taken, and can respond aggressively if they aren't satisfied with your response to their concerns. Having an established, well-documented procedure for receiving, reviewing, and responding to challenges is the best way to manage your patron's expectations around material challenges and to help your staff act with confidence should one occur. The following checklist is a great starting point for building your challenge procedures!

Request for reconsideration - questions to include

- Are you a resident of our official service area? (+ name / address)
- Library resource of concern (title, format, service (program/display/etc))
- What brought this resource to your attention?
- Did you examine the entire work?
- What is the theme of the work?
- What is your specific objection?
- Do you represent yourself or is this a part of a group or coordinated campaign (if a group which organization and how to contact directly)?
- Resources you recommend for purchase/presentation?

Immediate response to a formal challenge

- **Do not** remove challenged items from circulation while under review
- Attach relevant policies to your request for reconsideration form (review entire work, review policies, recommend retention, reclassification, or removal)
- Be clear that requests for reconsideration are recommendations to the library director
- Director decision conveyed in writing
- Possibility of appeal presented
- Treat challenges as confidential (if FOIA redact patron info)
- Report to the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom and relevant state library association

Proactive preparation

- Have speakers prepared to speak on behalf of free speech; teen speakers can be very impactful
- Request for reconsideration policy, collection development policy, ARSL Access to Information Statement (and /or ALA Library Bill of Rights) available on website
- Statement of serving all, opposition to censorship
- Scenario-based training for board and staff

Public comment guidelines for board meetings

- State name and address

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- Time limit for all public comment and no giving comment time to someone else
- No action taken after public comment
- May refer to formal process

Appeal process for patrons

- If made in writing, keep confidential (if FOIA redact patron info)
- If made during meeting public comment period there is no presumption of confidentiality
- Communicate final decision: retain, reclassify, or remove
- Implement standardized waiting period for repeat reconsideration (ex. 3 years)