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CHAPTER ONE

What is a Library?

[Disclaimer: *The information in this handbook is not legal advice. We recommend that you consult an attorney if you have any questions about how the laws apply to your library.*]

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 even chained rare volumes to tables.

Times have changed. We are now inundated with information 24 hours a day. Today's libraries focus on providing access to information, learning opportunities, and creative tools rather than serving as guardians of scarce resources.

The modern library is about community impact more than collections. Today's libraries are learning 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 continuing education. Library patrons and community members 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. Local libraries can best provide

community access to needed materials through participation in interlibrary loan consortia, regional and statewide cooperative networks, and local reciprocal lending collaboratives.

Confidentiality/Privacy

Protecting patron privacy and confidentiality is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship.

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.

Diversity

Libraries value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources, services and staff to the communities they serve. They are committed to inclusivity and social justice.

Education and Lifelong Learning

Libraries 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

Libraries 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. They provide 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

Censorship is 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 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 appendix. 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). You will find more information about these in Chapter 3.

The Public Good

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

Preservation

Preservation of information resources, including local historical and cultural resources, is central to libraries and librarianship.

Service

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

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

The Maine Library Landscape

Below are descriptions of some components of the Maine library community infrastructure. These organizations work together to provide Maine residents access to needed services and resources:

The Maine Regional Library System (MRLS)

Was established in by the Maine State Legislature in 1973 (*Title 27, Chapter 4 Subsections 113-117*). The mission of the MRLS is to promote and improve access to library services for all Maine residents. A public library may join the MRLS if it meets the Maine Library Commission's definition of a public library and adheres to the Public Library Standards discussed in Chapter 4.

The Maine Library Commission (MLC)

<https://www.maine.gov/msl/about/commission/index.shtml>

A board appointed by the Governor, broadly representative of the state's library community. The Commission establishes the policies and monitors the operations of the state library, advises on the expenditure of state and federal funds, and establishes guidelines and policies for statewide library programs. Composition of the Maine Library Commission is defined in *MRSA 27, Section 111*.

The Maine State Library (MSL)

<https://www.maine.gov/msl/>

Was established by the Legislature in 1836 and is located in the Maine Cultural Building on the Capitol campus. The state library's public facility serves all citizens and visitors, providing access to its collections, services, and programs in order to meet educational, informational, recreational and cultural needs. Other state library divisions support local library development and lead digitization and preservation efforts of special collections.

The Maine Library Advisory Council (MLAC)

<https://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/StatewideBoard.shtml>

Was established to improve communications of regional library needs and recommendations between the Maine State Library (MSL), the Maine Library Commission (MLC) and local libraries. Each of the nine MRLS regions elect a representative to the Council from all types of libraries. The representatives work closely with MSL regional liaisons to communicate needs and provide feedback on State Library services such as Area Reference and Resource Center (ARRC) services and interlibrary loan (ILL). The Council also assists the state library with its long-term planning and continuing education program planning, including Spring and Fall Council conferences.

The Area Reference and Resource Centers (ARRCs)

Coordinate back-up reference and ILL services in the northeastern, central, and southern Maine library districts. The ARRC libraries are Bangor Public Library (northeastern), Maine State Library and Lewiston Public Library (central), and Portland Public Library (southern). Local libraries work with their ARRC libraries to facilitate statewide resource sharing and ensure access to needed library services for all Maine residents.

Maine InfoNet

<https://www.maineinfonet.org/>

Is a library collaborative funded by the University of Maine Fogler Library, the Maine State Library, and participating libraries. Maine InfoNet manages the technical aspects of resource sharing infrastructure for the Maine library community. They oversee administration of the MaineCat and URSUS online catalogs as well as the Minerva and MILS consortia's integrated library systems, the Digital Maine Library, and Download Library of e-books and e-audiobooks.

NetworkMaine

<https://networkmaine.net/>

Is a unit of the University of Maine System that provides high-speed bandwidth access for the Maine School Library Network (MSLN), the low to no-cost Internet connections at most schools and libraries in the state.

Note: Learn about other library organizations and terms with the "Acronyms and Definitions" list in the Appendix.

Through participation in regional and statewide cooperative resource sharing networks, engagement with other library professionals, and collaboration with neighboring libraries, your library will be able to extend access to essential information services and materials for its community members. Operating as part of a larger library network will increase your library's capacity to provide high quality, cost-effective services to the public, students, and businesspeople in your area, including some services that would not even be possible without cooperation.

Resources

- Your Maine State Library regional liaison
<https://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/districts/index.shtml>
- Lankes, David R. *Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today's Complex World*. San Bernardino, CA: R. David Lankes, 2012. <https://davidlankes.org/new-librarianship/expect-more-demanding-better-libraries-for-todays-complex-world/>
- Aspen Institute. *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, 2014.
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- Zurinski, Stephanie, Valerie Osborne, Mamie Anthoine-Ney, and Janet McKenney. "Libraries in the Community: Changing Opportunities." *Maine Policy Review* 22.1 (2013): 71 -79,
<http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol22/iss1/16>.
- Edwards, Julie Biando, Melissa S. Rauseo, & Kelley Rae Unger. "Community Centered: 23 Reasons Your Library is the Most Important Place in Town." *Public Libraries* Apr. 30, 2018.
<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/04/community-centered-23-reasons-why-your-library-is-the-most-important-place-in-town/>
- Klinenberg, Eric. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, 2019.
- Maine Library Commission Definition of a Public Library
www.maine.gov/msl/libs/standards/definition.htm

