CHAPTER 1
WHAT IS A PUBLIC LIBRARY?

The public library's mission is to provide access to the world of information and ideas. The role of the modern library is more about community impact than collections of books. Libraries are places where all community members see themselves as welcome, with opportunities to contribute and have a voice. Today's libraries are community centers, where a community grows as people connected to ideas and resources.

RELATED COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARD(S)
ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

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The Definition of a Public Library

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the federal agency that supports and oversees federal funding for libraries in the United States, defines and 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 the services of the staff are available to the public
- facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule
- supported in whole or in part with public funds

Colorado

Colorado's public libraries are established and maintained according to the Colorado Library Law and subject to other legal requirements. Colorado law incorporates the federal definition of a public library and adds to it. C.R.S. § 24-90-103(5.5). This definition determines eligibility for state library funding, services, and resources. It is also used to determine which libraries are required to provide statistical data, called the Public Library Annual Report (PLAR).



Boulder Public Library

Colorado public libraries are tasked with ensuring that the public has equal access to information and materials (C.R.S. §24-90-102). Under Colorado Library Law, the state librarian must develop public library service standards to guide public library development (C.R.S. §24-90-105(2)(a.3)). Below are the minimum criteria set forth in the service standards required for entities wishing to be defined as a public library in Colorado.

Access & Services

- Have an ongoing collection budget from local tax funds and a collection management plan for the purchase of materials and electronic access.
- Provide at least one device with public access to the Internet, a printer, an email address, a website, an online information catalog, and databases.
- Be open to the public a minimum of 20 hours each week. These hours will include morning, afternoon, evening, and/or weekend hours based on users' and potential users' disposable time. All service outlets of libraries providing multiple access points must be open to the public for no fewer than 20 hours a week.

Legal Responsibilities

- Be legally established under Colorado Library Law (C.R.S. §24-90-101 et seq.)
- Comply with Colorado Library Law, as well as any federal, state, or local laws that affect library operations.
- Have a dedicated space that meets the criteria of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) applicable to libraries.
- Submit statistical data for the Public Library Annual Report to the State Library on time.

Library Administration & Management

- Provide free access to basic services as defined by written policies regarding lending, borrowing, and circulation services as approved by the library's Governing Authority.
- Have paid staff present during all hours of service. Pay of staff must be based on the cost-of-living standards within the community.
- Prepare and utilize a long-range strategic plan for continuous improvement.

Resource Sharing

- Be a member and fully participate in the Colorado Libraries Collaborate (CLC) program, extending privileges and services to state residents according to the CLC agreement.
- Comply with the Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States and adopt the Colorado Interlibrary Loan Best Practices for lending and borrowing materials through the statewide interlibrary loan network according to that code.
- Be a member of the Colorado Library Consortium (CLiC) and use its services as appropriate.

A Public Library Board

In Colorado, there are two types of public library boards – governing and advisory. Both types of boards are comprised of citizen volunteers known as “trustees,” “directors,” or “board members,” who guide & govern public libraries. They are the link between the library and the community, and they represent all members of the public. Each trustee brings their own strengths, skills, knowledge, and experience to the board. The board as a whole should represent a broad spectrum of the community.

The role of a library board is to set the library's policies and goals, hire and evaluate the library director, and oversee the library's general management. The board also advocates for the library within the community and with local government.

Effective library trustees are engaged with the community. They understand the library's role in the community and the political process. They are also willing to take on the responsibilities of public office.

Library boards that recognize the public library's role in the community build stronger partnerships. They work with other organizations to provide services that meet the needs of the community.

Types of Public Libraries and Their Associated Boards

The type of legal framework under which a library is established and organized is called the *legal basis*. Different laws apply to the different library types. A public library in Colorado has one of these four legal bases.

LEGAL BASIS	# OF PUBLIC LIBRARY JURISDICTIONS IN COLORADO
Municipal Government (city, town, or village)	38
County/Parish	11
Library District	56
Multi-Jurisdictional (school/public combined, city/county)	7
TOTAL	**112**

Within these four legal bases, the Library District is the only library type that is a governmental entity with its own governing authority. For a library district, the board of trustees is the library's governing authority and constitutes its own local government body. The responsibilities of a library district's board of trustees include fiduciary, facilities, and organizational systems. The library director reports to the library board of trustees, and staff are employees of the library district.

Public libraries that have a legal basis other than 'Library District' report to the governing authority for the local entity to which the library belongs (e.g., the city council, county board of commissioners, or other local leadership) and generally are referred to as an advisory board. The scope of these boards' authority often is set forth in an agreement or charter. Typically, these libraries use the local governmental fiscal, human resources, facilities, technology, and other organizational systems. Trustees of an advisory board are responsible for knowing which legal duties and authority have been granted to the board versus those that have been retained by the government authority to which the advisory board belongs. The advisory board of trustees should have on file all local agreements, charters, and memoranda for understanding between the library and its governing authority. These should also be sent to the State Library for our archives.

Decision Making with "Library" in Mind

In Colorado, a board of trustees, whether a governing board or an advisory board, must not only make decisions that follow the law, but must also consider decisions with the values and ethics of public libraries in mind. Trustees must "think library."

The core values of librarianship embodied in the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, Freedom to Read Statement, and Freedom to View Statement are 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.

Core Values of Librarianship

ACCESS

Access allows everyone in the community to obtain library resources and services with minimal disruption. Library workers create systems that ensure members of their community can freely access the information they need for learning, growth, and empowerment, regardless of technology, format, or delivery methods.

EQUITY

Library workers play a crucial role in fostering equity by actively working to dismantle barriers and create spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and beneficial for all. This is accomplished by recognizing and addressing systemic barriers, biases, and inequalities to create inclusive library environments where everyone can benefit from the library's offerings and services

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND PRIVACY

Intellectual freedom empowers people to think for themselves and to make informed decisions while respecting each individual’s dignity and independence. Library workers encourage people to cultivate curiosity and form ideas by questioning the world and accessing information from diverse viewpoints and formats without restrictions or censorship. The right to privacy is a crucial safeguard to this freedom, ensuring everyone has the right to develop their thoughts and opinions free of surveillance.

PUBLIC GOOD

Public good means working to improve society and protect the rights to education, literacy, and intellectual freedom. Libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies. Library workers provide the highest service levels to create informed, connected, educated, and empowered communities.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability means making choices that are good for the environment, make sense economically, and treat everyone equitably. Sustainable choices preserve physical and digital resources and keep services useful now and into the future. By supporting climate resilience, library workers create thriving communities and care for our common good for a better tomorrow.

Library bill of rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

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

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

VII. All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.

Freedom to Read statement

The American Library Association affirms the following propositions:

It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority.

Creative thought is, by definition, new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing, as mentors, the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters, values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous.

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

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We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

Freedom to View statement

As stated by the American Library Association:

The FREEDOM TO VIEW, along with the freedom to speak, to hear, and to read, is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. In a free society, there is no place for censorship of any medium of expression. Therefore, these principles are affirmed:

- To provide the broadest access to film, video, and other audiovisual materials because they are a means for the communication of ideas. Liberty of circulation is essential to insure the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression.
- To protect the confidentiality of all individuals and institutions using film, video, and other audiovisual materials.
- To provide film, video, and other audiovisual materials which represent a diversity of views and expression. Selection of a work does not constitute or imply agreement with or approval of the content.
- To provide a diversity of viewpoints without the constraint of labeling or prejudging film, video, or other audiovisual materials on the basis of the moral, religious, or political beliefs of the producer or filmmaker or on the basis of controversial content.
- To contest vigorously, by all lawful means, every encroachment upon the public's freedom to view.

Summary

Public libraries play an essential role in building strong and vibrant communities. They provide a place where people can come together to learn, connect, and grow. Libraries are a valuable resource for people of all ages, and they are an important part of the fabric of our communities.

As a steward of the public, your responsibility is to ensure that your library adheres to these principles and laws. As a trustee, you can help ensure that your library meets the needs of your community. You can do this by listening to the community, supporting the library's programs and services, and advocating for the library.

Try This

What type of public library do I serve as a board member?

- ☐ Municipal government (City, town, or village)
- ☐ County/Parish
- ☐ Library District
- ☐ Multi-jurisdictional (school/public combined, city/county)

I am member of a(n)

- ☐ governing board.
- ☐ advisory board.

My term of office is _____year(s).

Who does the library serve? What is its jurisdiction or legal service area?

- You can review a map of the legal service area with the Colorado State Library.
- You can review community data from the US Census office or reach out to the Colorado State Library.

What are the library's sources of funding?

- You can review revenue in your library's budget or annual audit.
