

Freedom of Expression and Inclusive Libraries

Introduction

Enabling students, faculty, and researchers to discover, explore, create, preserve, and disseminate knowledge is central to the mission of academic and research libraries. Our libraries take pride in their open, welcoming spaces, in the breadth of their collections and information access, and in their aim for inclusiveness in services, workforce and infrastructure

In 1987, CARL adopted a broad, collections-focused [position on Freedom of Expression](#) that has remained publicly available since that time. Thirty-five years on, this statement merited reexamination. The parameters of freedom of expression and the broader concept of intellectual freedom¹ are being reexamined as research libraries and the institutions of which they are a part take steps to further understand, reflect upon, and address equity, diversity, and inclusion deficits in their organizations.

The social climate challenges the long-held perception of the “neutrality” of the library, and the way libraries uphold freedom of expression as a core value needs to be further explored through the lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion.² To do so is challenging work for our libraries and our profession. But with awareness and action conducted in a spirit of humility and respect, CARL believes the community can aim to reconcile and advance *both* freedom of expression and inclusion as core values within the research library context.

Our Commitments

CARL member libraries share the following commitments:

- To take conscious, concrete, measurable steps to promote equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-oppression in our collections, programs, and services; and in our workforce and our human resource practices. In putting these values into practice, we strive to be a model within our campus and community settings.
- To be guided in our decisions and actions by the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) (Section 2) and the [Canadian Bill of Rights](#) (Clause 1); Canadian law; international declarations as adopted and applied in Canada and its provinces and territories, such as the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

¹ We consider ‘intellectual freedom’ to encompass the freedom to express, hold, and receive ideas without restriction.

² CARL’s Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group [defined these terms](#) for our purposes.

(Article 19) and the [UNESCO 2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#); and our home institutions' policies.

- To stand firm on the responsibility of research libraries to support learning and research by facilitating access to and preservation of all expressions of knowledge, opinion, intellectual activity, and creativity from all periods of history to the current era, including those that contemporary society, or some within it, may consider unconventional, unpopular, unfounded, distasteful, or unacceptable.
- To maintain the integrity of published or unpublished works; not to alter or censor them; and to continue to manage access to sensitive special collections, data, and material to support universities' teaching, learning, and research mission.
- To collaborate among ourselves and with impacted communities to address demeaning, inaccurate, or harmful expressions that the library community has itself created, such as naming conventions, subject headings, classification standards, and other metadata and associated practices.
- To reshape collections policy and practices to redress historical collection biases, while taking care not to inadvertently reinterpret, misrepresent, or censor the historical record.
- To acknowledge and enable Indigenous sovereignty over their data and traditional knowledge and cultural expressions.
- To foster information literacy as a proactive measure against the use of misinformation or the misuse of information in the learning, teaching, and scholarship that research libraries support.
- To affirm that open debate--including the expression of points of view that are unpalatable and may be emotionally challenging--is essential to individual intellectual growth, and strengthens Canada as a free and democratic society (per [Charter](#), Section 1). Discomfort should not be conflated with harm.
- To discourage and address expressions of intolerance that arise within our organizations and facilities. Public or individually-directed expressions of hatred, threat, or intimidation are not allowed, enabled, or tolerated within our facilities. We further commit to proactively establishing processes and procedures so that the steps to be taken to respond to such expressions are clear, known, aligned with legal and ethical principles, and followed.
- To work to embed in library and/or university policies that library spaces cannot be used by any community, student group or faculty for events that foster intolerance.
- To respect and uphold the principle and responsibilities of academic freedom according to institutional policy and applicable collective agreements.

In its work on behalf of its members, CARL (as an association) strives to support these positions. CARL commits to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within its own practices

and projects, and to fostering dialogue, understanding and the appropriate upholding of our common library values, including both freedom of expression and inclusion as they have been discussed here.

Adopted by the CARL Membership - April 2022