

Social Media Guidelines

for Public and Academic Libraries

Approved by the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee in June 2018

Policy Intent

The American Library Association has adopted the [Library Bill of Rights](#) and [interpretations](#) of the *Library Bill of Rights* to provide library governing authorities, librarians, other library staff, and library users with guidelines on how constitutional principles apply to U.S. libraries.

This document provides a policy and implementation framework for public and academic libraries engaging in the use of social media. The following information is provided solely as a guideline for creating a social media policy and is not intended as a comprehensive list of requirements or legal advice. Please consult legal counsel and your governing body for the approval of your policy statements.

Definitions

Social media

[Merriam Webster Dictionary](#)

communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages,

reasons but primarily to communicate information about library services and resources, and to engage with their communities. Social media sites may have their own terms of service, privacy, acceptable behavior, and stated consequences for violating those terms of service. Users can post their own content or respond to what has already been posted.

Designated public forum

Libraries are under no legal obligation to participate in social media, nor are they required to host public conversations. A library could choose, for instance, to solely participate in one-

Purpose and scope

The library should make its social media policy publicly available on its website and link to the policy from social media platforms whenever possible.

There is a range of possible community engagement levels available to libraries; some examples are listed below:

1. The library posts information related to its services and operations for its constituents and does not seek out or respond to comments.
2. The library posts information and will conduct occasional calls for survey responses or comments. The library reserves the right to close comments at a predetermined time and not in response to the commentary received.
3. The library invites people to post or comment occasionally on various issues.
4. The library engages with its community regarding matters related to library resources and services.
5. The library serves as a forum for the discussion of many issues related to its collections, programs, and spaces.

Statements may also address the larger purpose of the library and its governing body,

Audience

As a best practice, the library should identify its intended audience. An academic library may limit its intended audience to university faculty, students, staff, administrators, and alumni. It can be expanded further to include specialized communities outside of the university, such as scholars within a particular discipline, or even the general public. Public libraries may identify their audience as those people residing within their official service area.

Staff responsibilities

Consequences

Libraries should clearly state the consequences for posts that do not meet the library's social media policy, which should be drafted in consultation with legal counsel. Best practices include developing a procedure through which libraries notify patrons of why they are being blocked, provide an appellate process within the library for the patron to challenge the removal, and determine an acceptable time period for the patron to proceed through a reinstatement procedure. Permanently blocking a patron from the social media site based on prior comments could be considered a prior restraint in violation of the First Amendment.

The social media content of a public library or publicly funded academic library can be subject to an open records, or Freedom of Information Act, request. Content that is removed for any reason whatsoever should be securely retained in accordance with

it will not collect, sell or knowingly transfer to any third party any personally identifiable information related to social media engagement with the library. Please be advised that [platform] has its own privacy policies, which can be found here [link] and should be