

**Services to People with Physical and Mental Disabilities:
An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights***

The American Library Association recognizes that people with physical and mental disabilities are a large and neglected minority in our society. In addition to many physical challenges, some persons with disabilities face economic inequity, illiteracy, cultural isolation, and discrimination in education, employment, and a broad range of societal activities. The library plays a catalytic role in the lives of people with disabilities by facilitating their full participation in society.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution mandates the right of all persons to free expression and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. A person's right to use the library should not be denied or abridged because of disabilities. The library has the responsibility to provide materials “for the interest, information and enlightenment of all people the community serves.” (See also the *Library Bill of Rights*.) When information in libraries is not presented in formats that are accessible to all users, the result is a barrier that discriminates against people with different abilities.

Library staff should be proactive in reaching out to persons with disabilities and facilitating provision of resources and services. Library staff also should be aware of the available technologies and how to assist all users with library technology. Books and other library resources should be available in formats accessible by persons of all ages with different abilities for learning and acquiring information. These materials must not be restricted by any presuppositions about the information needs, interests, or capacity for understanding of persons with disabilities. The library should offer different modes of access to the same content using equipment, electronics, or software. All information resources provided directly or indirectly by the library—regardless of technology, format, or method of delivery—should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users. Libraries should make every effort to support the needs of their users with disabilities and when necessary, should seek financial or other assistance to do so.

ALA recognizes that providing specialized services often requires retention of extensive patron records, such as a user's transaction history, in order to provide equal access. Such libraries assume responsibility for protecting the confidentiality of personally identifiable information entrusted to them to perform the service.

Libraries should provide training opportunities for all staff and volunteers in order to sensitize them to issues affecting people with disabilities and to teach effective techniques for providing services for users with disabilities and for working with colleagues with disabilities.

Libraries should use strategies based upon the principles of universal design to ensure that library facilities, policies, services, and resources meet the needs of all users. Libraries should provide a path for persons with disabilities to request accommodations that will enable them to fully participate in library programs and services. Further, libraries and schools should work with people with disabilities, agencies, organizations, and vendors to integrate assistive technology into their facilities and services to meet the needs of people with a broad range of disabilities, including learning, mobility, sensory, and developmental disabilities.

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The preamble to the *Library Bill of Rights* states, “all libraries are forums for information and ideas.” By removing the physical, technological, and procedural barriers to accessing those forums, libraries promote the full inclusion of people with physical and mental disabilities into our society.

ALA Policy (54.3.2)