Library Policy Documents for Effective Library Operations

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Overview

- Why do we need policies?
- Who has the authority to establish policies?
- How are policies organized?
- What is PLA's *Policies for Results*, and do we have to use it?
- What makes a policy good?
- Where do we go for help?

Why Policies?

- Framework for equitable operations
  - Avoid case-by-case decisions
  - Reduce misunderstandings
    - ✓ Staff know procedures
    - ✓ Patrons know what to expect
- If done well, promote a positive image of the library

Policies Provide Stability

- Legal protection for library
  - Help prevent and defend against lawsuits
  - Provide stability for staff
  - Provide library with means to accept and deny gifts
  - Establish operations that comply with statutes
  - Produce fair, legal procedures

Horror Story 1

- Hypothetical Public Library has no collection development or gift policy, but accepts "free" subscriptions to *Sierra* and *Christian Science Monitor*

- Aggressive patron offers subscriptions to slanted political magazines

- Without a formal policy, the library has no basis to decline the offer

Horror Story 2

- Hypothetical Public Library has no patron conduct or meeting room policy
- Salesman creates daily office in study room, plugs in computer, printer, takes cell phone calls
- Library bans him from using the library based on noise and expense
- Salesman now conducts business from posh office leased with proceeds from lawsuit

Policy Blocks

- Inertia— "We have always done it this way."
- Defiance— "We don't need no stinking policies!"
- Guilt— "I know I should do them. I'm a bad director!"
- Complacency— "We've never had any complaints."
- Denial— "I think the board already did policies."
- Procrastination— "I have too much to do! Who has time?"

Wisconsin's library law establishes library board's authority to create policies

"Every public library shall be free for the use of the inhabitants of the municipality by which it is established and maintained, subject to such reasonable regulations as the library board prescribes in order to render its use most beneficial to the greatest number. The library board may exclude from the use of the public library all persons who willfully violate such regulations." [43.52(2)]

Other Statutory Consideration

43.15(4)(c) A municipal, county or joint public library may participate in a public library system if it meets all of the following requirements: …

   4. Enters into a written agreement with the public library system board … to provide, to any resident of the system area, the same library services, on the same terms, that are provided to the residents of the municipality or county that established the member library.

Still More Legal Authority

"…The library board also shall have exclusive charge, control and custody of all lands, buildings, money or other property devised, bequeathed, given or granted to, or otherwise acquired or leased by, the municipality for library purposes." [43.58(1)

"…the library board shall supervise the administration of the public library and shall appoint a librarian…and prescribe [library employee] duties and compensation." [43.58(4)]

Policy Roles: Board

- Accept input from director and staff
  - To determine need for a policy
  - To develop effective, enforceable policies
- Objectively evaluate policy proposals
- Review policies regularly; amend if needed
- Review and resolve challenges to policy

Policy Roles: Director and Staff

- Advise board of policy needs

- Help draft policy statements

- Stay aware of current practices and laws

- Develop procedures and best practices to carry out adopted policies

- Implement policies consistently

Policy Manual

- A central repository for current policies
- A manner to collect and organize them
  - Clear to library users
  - Easy to access for library staff
  - Conducive to insert or amend
  - Shows policy history

Considerations

There is no absolute rule to organizing and categorizing your policies. But…

- Board should decide which is appropriate:
  - Many individual, narrow policies
  - Fewer broad, multi-faceted policies
- How to update policies, identify and disseminate them effectively

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Doctrinal Policies

- ALA Bill of Rights
  - Freedom to Read, View
  - Intellectual Freedom
- Confidentiality, Privacy
- Board and Staff Ethics

Operational Policies

- Library Hours and Services
- Patron Conduct
- Emergencies and Disasters

Service and Access Policies

- Circulation & Collection Use
- Library Cards, Fines, Loan Periods
- ILL and Reference Services
- Internet or Computer Use
- Alternate formats and accommodations
- Special collections, genealogy
- Equipment and telephone use

Collection Policies

- Collection development & selection
- Material media types
- Rental collections; lease plans
- Weeding and replacement
- Reconsideration of Library Materials

Personnel Policies

- Legal Considerations
  - Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity
  - Federal and State statutory requirements
- Staff conduct, dress code, grievances, discipline
- Benefits, retirement, sick leave
- Adopt or vary from municipality's policies

Financial Policies

- Investment policy
- Receipts, handling cash, checks
- Purchasing policy
- Donations, bequests, endowments
- Petty cash

Policy Manual Examples

- Newport Public Library (Oregon)

  http://www.newportlibrary.org/policy.htm

- Horsham Township Library (Pennsylvania)

  http://htl.mclinc.org/Policy manual.html

- Waupaca Area Library

  http://www.waupacalibrary.org/about/policy.asp

- Radford Public Library (Virginia)

  http://www.radford.va.us/library/Policy_Manual_2001.htm

PLA's *Policies for Results*

- Another entry in the *Results* series
- Comprehensive policy planning and development process
- Framework to make decisions within
- Covers from concept through examples
- May be too elaborate for a small library to implement, but concepts apply

Policy Elements

Components of library policy:

- Policy Statement

- Regulation

- Procedure

- Guidelines

Policy Statement

- A brief statement explaining why library does something

   The Hypothetical Public Library will not charge for the use or loan of materials it owns or obtains. However, the Library may assess fines or fees to encourage the return of Library materials and charge for services including, but not limited to, photocopies and meeting room rentals.

Regulation

- Specific written rules defining the policy and establishing WHAT must be done

- Approved by the library board

- Typically the bulk of the official library policy

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Procedure

- Developed by the staff and approved by department managers and library director

- Good practice to distribute to board FYI

- Step-by-step HOW staff will carry out the policy and its regulations

- Make sure it reflects achievable and expected practices

Guidelines

- Description of Best Practices offering suggestions on circumstances
- Often developed by staff and approved by director
- Not always required
- Examples:
  - Special needs & accommodations
  - Special circumstances for circulation exemption
  - Process for determining when "guest" card is okay
  - Reference or genealogy services

Policy Audit

- An important part of a comprehensive policy review, especially if:
  - ➢ The library has no collected manual
  - ➢ It is unclear if a board adopted policy exists
  - ➢ Different employees or departments have disparate procedures or practices
- Data-collecting portion of policy process

Audit Steps

- If appropriate, a committee may be formed to ferret out existing policies, procedures, and practices

- Review different approaches to the problem

- Determine what is permissible and what must be avoided

- Review existing policy or options in relation to current practice

Identifying the Options

- Don't consider only the policy you have, review the full range of approaches

- Discuss at both staff and board levels the implications of various options

- Consider a committee to reach consensus and recommend draft to the board

- Procedures may be developed while policy is drafted

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What makes for a good policy?

- Complies with law
- Promotes the best interest of all community members
- Consistent with the library's mission
- Fair to all and respectful of individual rights and individual differences
- Easily understood and interpreted
- Promotes positive public image of library

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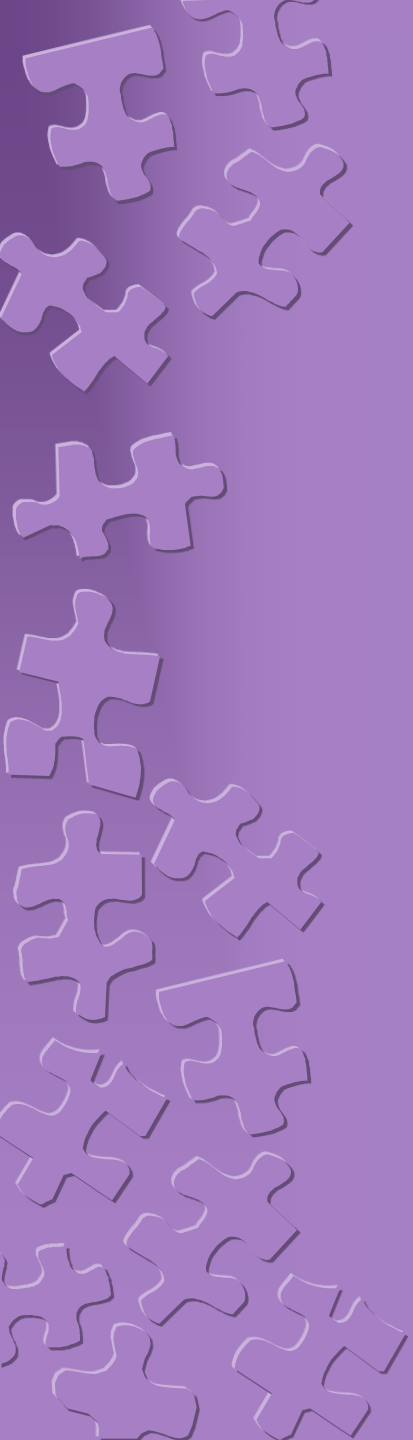# Four tests of a legally-enforceable policy

1. It must comply with current statutes and court cases
2. It must be reasonable (and all penalties must be reasonable)
3. It must be clear (not ambiguous or vague)
4. It must be applied without discrimination

—Michigan Library Development & Data Services

Examples of test #1:
It must comply with current law

- A library policy charging patrons for use of computers in the library would be contrary to Wis. Stats. section 43.52(2)

- A policy that says the library's public meeting room cannot be used for religious purposes would be unconstitutional under a Wisconsin federal district court decision

Example of test #2:
It must be reasonable

- A library policy that says "all talking in the library is prohibited and anyone who talks in the library will permanently lose library use privileges" is clearly an unreasonable rule with an unreasonably harsh penalty
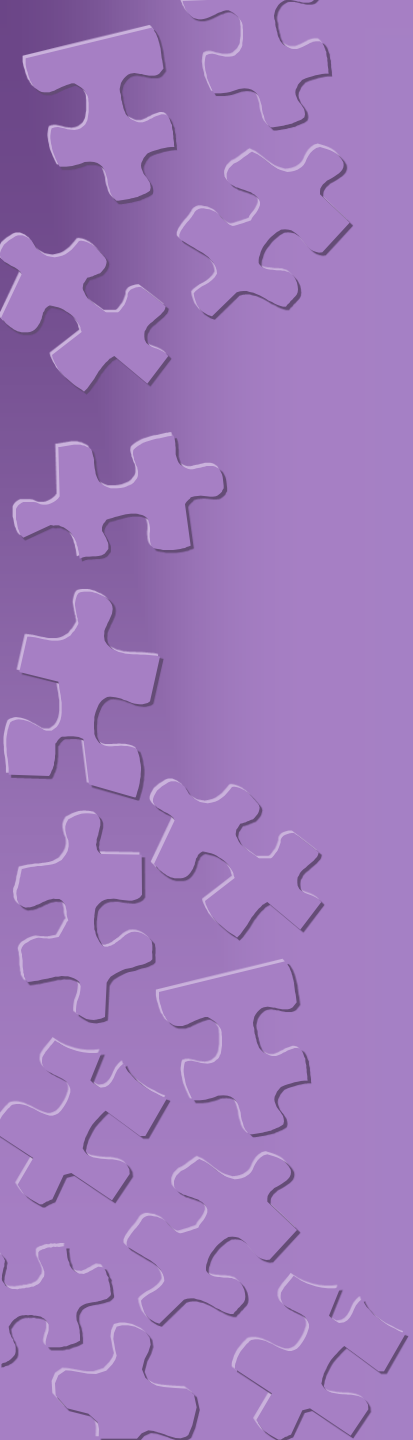
Example of test #3:
It must be clear

- A policy that says "library use privileges will be revoked if a patron has too many overdue books" is too vague to be fairly administered

- Policy and penalty must be quantifiable

- Someone reading the policy will know what constitutes a violation

Example of test #4:
It must be applied without discrimination.

- If a library charges fines, it cannot give preferential treatment to some patrons. For example, if the library sometimes waives fines, that waiver must be available to all patrons on an equal basis, not just to friends of library staff or politically important people

Suggestions of essential public library policies

- Service (including hours open)
- Circulation
- Collection development
- Confidentiality of patron records
- Meeting room use (if the library has a public meeting room)
- Personnel
- Use of electronic resources

  For samples of these and other policies see:

  http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/policies.html

Cheat Sheet

- Wisconsin Policy Page
  http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/policies.html

- Sample Policies for the Small Public Library
  http://www.owlsweb.info/L4L/policies/sample.asp

- State of Ohio Sample Policies
  http://winslo.state.oh.us/publib/policies.html

- Connecticut Sample Policy Directory
  http://ct.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=7050

- Sample Library Policy Wiki
  http://wiki.webjunctionworks.org/index.php/

Discussion questions

1. What are some ways that a library can audit for a collection development policy?

2. Who should serve on a policy review committee?

3. Who is responsible for carrying out library policies?

4. How should complaints about policy be handled?

For more information contact:

- Your library system staff

- Your municipal attorney

- Wisconsin Public Library Policy Resources web page at: http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/policies.html

- John DeBacher, Consultant, Public Library Administration, (608) 266-7270 or john.debacher@dpi.wi.gov