

On June 26, 2018, ALA Council was presented with an update to the 1991 “Meeting Rooms; An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*” as part of the Intellectual Freedom Committee’s [Report to Council](#). ([PDF](#))

The ALA Council voted to adopt the revised interpretation as outlined in the [Council Actions](#) document on page 16.

On August 16, 2018, ALA Council voted on a [resolution](#) to rescind the language from this 2018 update and revert to the [1991 original interpretation](#).

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Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

Many libraries provide meeting rooms and other spaces designated for use by the public for meetings and other events as a service to their communities. Article VI of the *Library Bill of Rights* states, “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.” Libraries do not advocate or endorse the viewpoints of meetings or meeting room users, just as they do not endorse the viewpoints of works in their collections. This interpretation provides general guidelines regarding meeting rooms and other spaces and does not constitute legal advice.

Libraries offering meeting rooms and spaces should develop and publish policies governing use after consultation with legal counsel. These policies can properly define time, place, or manner of use; such restrictions should not pertain to the content of a meeting or to the beliefs or affiliations of the sponsors. Policies should be made available in all of the commonly used languages within the community served.

Public libraries are bound by the First Amendment and the associated law governing access to a designated public forum. A publicly funded library is not obligated to provide meeting room space to the public, but if it chooses to do so, it cannot discriminate or deny access based upon the viewpoint of speakers or the content of their speech. This encompasses religious, political, and hate speech.¹ If a library allows charities, non-profits, and sports organizations to discuss their activities in library meeting rooms, then the library cannot exclude religious, social, civic, partisan political, or hate groups from discussing their activities in the same facilities. Allowing religious groups to use the library’s meeting rooms and spaces does not constitute a breach of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause.²

Libraries should post a permanent notice, in the languages commonly used in the community, near the meeting rooms and spaces stating that the library does not advocate or endorse the viewpoints expressed in meetings or by meeting room users.

Libraries should write policies in inclusive rather than exclusive terms. For example, a policy that the library's facilities are open "to organizations engaged in educational, cultural, intellectual, or charitable activities" is an inclusive statement of the limited uses of the facilities. This defined limitation would permit most groups to use the facilities because they engage in intellectual activities, but would exclude most commercial sales in the facilities.

Written policies may also include limitations on frequency of use and require adherence to the library's behavior policy.³ The policy should also state whether meetings held in library spaces must be open to the public or if the library allows private social events such as birthday celebrations, anniversaries, wedding receptions, showers, or parties. Libraries may choose to offer space for public or private events unless restricted by state or local laws. The same standards and policies should apply to all uses.

If meeting rooms and spaces are open to the public, libraries should include a section in their policy that addresses fees. Charging fees does not change the status of meeting rooms and spaces as designated public forums. Library governing bodies which decide whether to charge fees for use of library spaces should consider local and state laws, the ALA's *Code of Ethics*, and the *Library Bill of Rights*. Charging fees for the use of library meeting rooms or facilities may abridge or deny access for some community members.⁴

Article V of the *Library Bill of Rights* states, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." This applies with equal force to the library's meeting rooms and spaces designated for public use as it does to the library's collections and services.

1. "[White Supremacist Wins Library Venue in Schaumburg](#)," *American Libraries Magazine*, August 20, 2001; "[White Supremacists to Meet after Library Changes Policy](#)," *Library Journal* staff, *Library Journal*, November 5, 2002.
2. *Concerned Women for America v. Lafayette County*, 883 F.2d 32 (5th Cir. 1989).
3. "[Guidelines for the Development of Policies and Procedures Regarding User Behavior and Library Usage](#)," adopted January 24, 1993 by the Intellectual Freedom Committee; revised November 17, 2000; January 19, 2005; and March 29, 2014.
4. "[Economic Barriers to Information Access: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)," adopted June 30, 1993, by the ALA Council.

Adopted July 2, 1991, by the ALA Council. The interpretation revision was endorsed by COPE and endorsed in principle by ASCLA and IFRT.

See Also

- [“Religion in American Libraries: Question and Answers,”](#) Intellectual Freedom Committee, 2010
- “Responding to and Preparing for Controversial Program and Speakers Q&A,” Intellectual Freedom Committee, June 2018.
- [“Hate Speech and Hate Crime,”](#) ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, December 2017.