

Q&A from August 6, 2025 Webinar

Protecting Access: Concrete ways to Prepare for and Respond to Book Challenges

Q1: Is the number for those that are only successfully banned or [challenge] requests as well?

A: The numbers that Sabrina Baeta mentioned were from PEN America's work on K-12 public school book bans, which does not include challenges that did not result in a ban. The definition and research focuses on titles that have been removed from access - bans. More information can be found on the frequently asked questions found [here](#).

Q2: Where do you report book bans?

A: Many organizations accept and encourage book ban reports.

- [PEN America](#)
- [American Library Association - Office of Intellectual Freedom](#)
- [National Council Against Censorship](#)

Among others.

Q3: Are book bans primarily coming from red states, or blue states?

A: Book bans are coming from almost all states. But the way they look is different. "Red states" often have legislation that accelerate the censorship activities in districts and public libraries whereas "Blue" states do not. However, the pressure that causes the stress and pressure on librarians is coming from the same origins: an organized effort to push against public institutions like libraries and public schools.

Q4: Usually we hand a form to the book in question. What if the patron does not want to fill out the form but wants the book removed anyways?

A: Your policies are the core tool you have to protect the right to read. If they do not fill out a form and are unwilling to have a conversation, you cannot consider removing the title. This is why we strongly recommend that library staff practice these conversations through role play, to be prepared in the real moment. This is also why we encourage ensuring that all employees

(not just front line staff but everyone, from trustees to volunteers) has read, understands, and can speak to your collection development policy.

Q5: Can ALA even help in states that have banned participation in it? State library associations are becoming anemic in those states.

A: The Office of Intellectual Freedom protects the privacy of all who request assistance - that's important to remember. We also strongly encourage people who ask for help to use secondary email addresses to reach out - meaning, don't use your library/work email account. There are multiple organizations working in this space, EveryLibrary in particular. So, while you may not be able to be in touch with ALA or other library associations, know that these organizations are working hard to coordinate help for librarians and libraries.

Q6: Our City Council is so conservative they're not even allowing us to be member of ALA or state library association. Can't attend webinars or purchase materials from them either.

A: You are not alone and this is not the first time we've heard from someone about these issues. It is incredibly difficult. We recommend looking for resources from some of the state groups, such as Texas Freedom to Read Project, or national organizations such as EveryLibrary.

Q7: One of the proposals, outlined in Project 2025 (a document written by a high-profile conservative think tank for a conservative presidency), suggests criminalizing public educators and librarians who include LGBT+ material in their collections—even going as far as to denote LGBT+ material as pornographic, and those who purvey it sex offenders. Many ideas in Project 2025 have come to light. What do we do if this proposal gets pushed? How do we support our staff, particularly our queer staff, in the face of a presidency that doesn't honor the rights of librarians and queer people?

A: This is a really important question, and a huge risk that we face right now. The most important thing we can do is publicly and proactively speak for the right to read materials that reflect life as it is - with all families. We must be allies to all of our communities. We also suggest helping all library staff to understand these disturbing trends and the reality of this moment in time. This is where practicing responses and actions to respond to these trends (denoting LGBTQI+ materials as pornographic, for example) is essential. Not allowing these efforts to rest on the shoulders of vulnerable staff is also essential. We are stronger together and have a responsibility to each other.

Q8: How can librarians address attempts at book banning and censorship, within the library space, such as patrons physically hiding books or turning around books they disagree with from displays? More passive attempts?

A: If you don't already follow [Kelly Jensen at Book Riot](#), we encourage you to do so. Kelly analyzes censorship and has for nearly a decade, and in particular, Kelly has been following "hide the pride" among other actions. She also does an annual report on these actions that surveys librarians about these kinds of campaigns. She also has a [thread](#) that contains a significant number of resources and is updated regularly.

Q9: I live in Montgomery County, Maryland. The Supreme Court in June ruled in favor of letting parents opt out when certain books are being presented to their children. I'm not a professional librarian. What can I do as an ally?

A: Those organizations helpful for community organizing: PEN America, NCAC, and state level organizations. Those are all great organizations to reach out to and to support. As an ally, we collectively must be local and vocal about supporting institutions (schools and libraries) to maintain access to books that reflect the diversity of life in all communities. Paying attention to what is happening at your local district is important, as some districts have moved to omitting LGBTQI+ representation from the curriculum as a whole. As an ally, you can keep an eye out for this and advocate against it if it happens or is proposed.

Q10: How can we librarians from Canada get actively involved and help?

A: Canada and the United States have a different framework around freedom to expression, which means sometimes the solutions and organizations to support librarians and libraries look different. But the political forces pushing for conservatism and a narrowing of rights exist across both nations, and it is important to recognize those forces.

Librarians from Canada: one of the best ways to support the freedom to read is to make sure you are following/watching for signs of attacks on the freedom to read in your country. That means following organizations such as:

[Canadian Authors and Illustrators Against Book Bans](#)

[PEN Canada](#)

[Centre for Free Expression](#)

[Canadian School Libraries](#)

[Canadian Library Association](#) or your local provincial organization

And make sure you are following the [Canadian Library Challenges Database](#) and reporting information, including challenges, to this database.

Q11: The answer is probably in the proverbial policy, but can you speak a little about how to handle patrons' requests to purchase items that have religious, political, anti-ABC agendas?

A: I think it is very important to hold the line on collections acquisition and management policies. That means, to process those requests for purchase the same way any other requests are handled, following the collection development policy. And document, document, document every purchase request decision in writing. No matter what, following the same collection development protocol for all materials is the guidestar for getting through censorship and scrutiny.

Q12: Our frontline staff seem reluctant to involve our librarians in these interactions (as outlined in our policy). Any advice for persuading folks that this is "above their pay grade"?

A: This is a great question and suggests the challenges of this time we are living through. This is where leadership must emphasize the collaborative nature that is necessary in these moments. Everyone is responsible for the library, but some staff (in the case of your question, the librarians) are further professionally trained to speak to library processes and the collection development policy during a challenge interaction. This is where regular role play and clear directives will help: walk your frontline staff through scenarios in which they are required, as part of their job duties, to escalate the interaction to another person(s) on staff. You might also have preprinted, guiding templates at the front desks for staff ("if X happens, next step is to involve Y person").