
TITLE: Customer Complaints About Library Materials **POLICY:** A-1003

AUTHORITY: Chief Executive Officer

Effective:

October 4, 2000

Reviewed:

October 11, 2017

Revised:

September 18, 2020

POLICY STATEMENT

Materials in the Library's collection are selected under the guidelines established in the Library's Collection Management Policy.

The Library recognizes that there will be, from time to time, customer complaints or concerns about a specific title or type of material selected for, or deselected (weeded) from, the collection. When a complaint is made, the Library must ensure that the complaint is handled seriously and, at the same time, make certain that the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom are upheld. This policy outlines the approach to be followed.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and procedures on how to address challenges to library material, whether the goal is to remove, add, or limit access to the Library's collection, or to limit the Library's ability to deselect items from the collection.

The Customer's Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials procedures, must be followed by customers when challenging materials and by the EPL staff when reconsidering challenged materials. If customers do not follow steps in the order elaborated, their complaints will not be considered further by Library staff. Usually a complaint is brought up in conversation, by email, chat, or telephone. Occasionally, a short letter may be written to the Library. Sometimes the request is simply a query; at other times the customer wants the material segregated or removed. If there are no legal grounds e.g. libel or sedition, for excluding the book, such censorship attempts are resisted (refer to Intellectual Freedom Policy and Freedom to Read brochure). As a standard practice, every written complaint is investigated.

The Director, Branch Services and Collections considers the recommendation, makes a decision and provides a written response to the customer that includes the Freedom to Read brochure. The response is sent out within one month of receipt of *Customer's Request for Reconsideration* form at the service point and is copied to the originating service point manager.

A customer may appeal the decision to the CEO and, subsequently, to the Board of Trustees.

Related Policies

[Intellectual Freedom Board Policy \(B-2012\)](#)

[Collection Development Board Policy \(B-2003\)](#)

Procedures and Guidelines

The procedure for dealing with customer complaints is as follows:

1. Staff should try to handle the initial complaint in an informal and helpful way.
2. Focus on the issue of choice, diversity of views, protected expressions of knowledge, and ideas, explaining the Library's Intellectual Freedom Policy.
3. Explain that censorship is a two-edged sword, i.e. it cuts both ways, and people who object to material that the complainant may well find satisfactory could argue that once objectionable materials have been removed for one person, other materials based on their objections should logically be removed as well.
4. If the informal approach does not work, then the matter should be referred as quickly as possible to the branch manager or a member of the leadership team. If unavailable, proceed to providing the complainant with the [Customer's Request for Reconsideration of Library Material](#).

Please note that the *Customer's Request for Reconsideration of Library Material* form formalizes the process and for the average enquiry it could be considered formidable and a deterrent to obtaining some simple information and explaining the concept of intellectual freedom. For this reason, staff should ensure the informal approach is exhausted before providing the [Customer's Request for Reconsideration of Library Material](#).

5. The staff member should request the complainant complete the form [Customer's Request for Reconsideration of Library Material](#).
6. Explain that the completed complaint form will be used to investigate the matter and as the basis for a response. No promise should be made that materials will be removed. Inform the customer that they will receive a response within one month's time.
7. The branch manager sends a letter to the customer (Appendix I) notifying them in writing that their concerns will be investigated, and that they will receive a written response from the Director, Branch Services and Collections within one month.
8. The item and form are forwarded to the Manager, Collection Management and Access, who delegates the investigation to the appropriate Collections Librarian.
9. Within one week, the Collections Librarian gathers together documentation regarding the item (e.g. book reviews, circulation/use statistics, author's reputation, awards).
10. The Collections librarian reads/views/listens to the item and prepares a recommendation and rationale within two weeks.
11. The Collections librarian forwards the item, documentation, recommendation (retention, removal, or other options), and supporting rationale to the Director, Branch Services and Collections for consideration.

Timelines

1. Within 24 hours of receiving a formal challenge via the [Customer's Request for Reconsideration of Library Material](#) form, the Branch Manager will send a letter to the customer to notify them that their complaint has been received and investigated.
2. Within one week of receipt of a formal challenge, the Collection Librarian will gather together documentation regarding the item.
3. Within two weeks of receipt of a formal challenge, the Collections librarian will read/view/listen to the item and prepare a recommendation and rationale for the Director of Branch Services and Collections.
4. Within one month of receipt of a formal challenge, the Director, Branch Services and Collections will respond in writing to the customer with a decision.

Attachments

[Letter to Customer \(sample\)](#)

[Customer's Request for Reconsideration of Library Material Form](#)

APPENDIX I

Sample letter below.

Letterhead template available in Word: FILE > NEW > MY TEMPLATES > EPL GENERAL (tab) > LETTER-TEMPLATE.dotm

DATE

CUSTOMER NAME/ADDRESS

Dear _____:

I have received your comments concerning the (**BOOK/VIDEO.....**), entitled _____, which you recently borrowed from the _____ Branch of the Edmonton Public Library.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the reconsideration form.

I have forwarded your comments and the (**BOOK/VIDEO.....**) itself for review to Sharon Day, Director, Branch Services and Collections. You will receive a written response from her within the next month.

Thank you for your interest in the Edmonton Public Library.

Yours sincerely,

**MANAGER
SERVICE POINT**

cc: Sharon Day, Director, Branch Services and Collections
Nancy Porteous, Manager, Collection Management and Access