

OPEN TO

ALL

Serving the LGBTQIA+ Community in Your Library

*A Toolkit from the
American Library
Association Rainbow
Round Table*



Introduction

This Toolkit is designed to help library staff better understand gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, and other queer (LGBTQIA+) library users, how to best serve their needs, and how to manage challenges that often arise.

Acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people in mainstream American society has been steadily growing. However, library materials, programs, and displays related to sexual orientation and gender identity still cause controversy. The fear of a challenge may cause some librarians to be deterred from buying materials or including services for LGBTQIA+ people in their service profile; failing to provide these resources in ways that can be easily used by vulnerable populations are forms of censorship and discrimination.

Every community has a LGBTQIA+ population and LGBTQIA+ families. The job of librarians, whether serving adults, teens, children, students, parents, or others, is to make libraries welcoming and open to all.

- Public libraries are committed to serving and representing their entire community including LGBTQIA+ library users and families whether or not they are “out.”
- School libraries are particularly important; teenagers question their sexuality and identity and need a welcoming place; children and teens need to see themselves represented in books at school as well as at the public library.
- Academic libraries should not only provide access to collections and academic support, but also welcoming spaces.

In any community, there are LGBTQIA+ persons who are not ready to be recognized as such, and it’s important to avoid assumptions and act with respect. People who are “in the closet” or questioning often need information resources the most, so it is essential to provide safe and anonymous access, without judgment. It is vital to create a welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ library users in their communities, campuses, and schools.

Meeting the Needs of LGBTQIA+ Library Users

LGBTQIA+ library users don’t expect to be treated any differently than any other user; they want to be able to find information that is relevant to them and their needs and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Symons and Freeman (2015) state that:

LGBT patrons and their allies want their privacy protected from prying eyes (which libraries already do well); the ability to check out materials without comment or judgment; materials that are interesting,

timely, and bought on-par with other subject matters; resources available in local branches without the need to order them from the far-flung reaches of the library galaxy; and programming to meet the needs of children, teens, adults, and families. Further, LGBT patrons want all of these things without having to ask.

LGBTQIA+ community members may not be aware of the materials available to them at your library, so specialized promotion and outreach will raise awareness and highlight the diversity of library

resources. It is vital to hold programs and events for LGBTQIA+ users and families.

Collections that serve children should include fiction with diverse protagonists of minority sexualities, gender identities, and family structures, as well as nonfiction materials for school research projects. Children are often aware of their sexuality and gender at an early age, and there are increasing numbers of families with same-gender parents. Representation of these identities and families is critical for building healthy perceptions among youth.

Not all academic institutions include specific Gender and Sexuality Studies among their constituents,

however, information about LGBTQIA+ issues should be a part of every academic library collection.

Health information is critical in all types of libraries as mainstream information often does not account for particular risks or health complications faced by gender and sexual minorities. Additionally, such cases may be difficult to access, due to either supply or insurance gaps, and individuals may rely on freely accessible information until treatment is available.

Library users are of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, nationalities, socio-economic classes, and abilities. Look for materials that include and celebrate diverse experiences within LGBTQIA+ communities and promote accessible and inclusive programming.

Pertinent Terminology

The LGBTQIA+ community is complex and has its own terminology which can be very unfamiliar to some. The following two websites may be helpful in providing an understanding of terms and concepts used by your LGBTQIA+ library users.

- GLAAD Media Reference Guide: <https://www.glaad.org/reference>
- Human Rights Campaign Glossary of Terms: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

Practical Tips for Library Services

- Think about “what you call people” who come into the library. Do you tend to use gendered titles, such as Sir or Ma’am? Addressing library users by a first name may seem uncomfortable at first, but it could do wonders in making a trans library user feel welcome.
- Look at policies respecting library users’ choice to change the name on their record. Changing names on federal and state-issued ID cards can be an extensive process; make policies that offer library users greater control over their identity at the library.
- When talking to children, ask if an *adult* is with them. Not every child (not just those of same sex parents) has a mother and father. Doing this allows children to respond how they are comfortable and lets parents know you are sensitive to a variety of families.
- Avoid asking for gender on forms or dividing activities by gender.
- If your facility marks single-seat bathrooms with gendered indicators, use neutral or inclusive symbols to indicate the bathroom location.
- Many library users prefer self-checkout machines and self-service holds because of privacy issues. If this is not an option at your library, be sure your staff respects all library users’ right to privacy.
- Create pathfinders, subject guides or reader’s advisory bookmarks related to topics of LGBTQIA+ interest.
- Include LGBTQIA+ books in genre or other displays and in book talking and readers’ advisory.
- Keep conscious efforts within hiring practices to interview and welcome the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ staff.

Outreach and Partnerships

Collaboration is key! Every community is different. You may have social service organizations or fraternal groups in your area to connect with.

- In a larger city or urban area, check for a LGBTQIA+ Chamber of Commerce. In a more rural community, LGBTQIA+ related organizations may be few and distant.
- In schools, there are counselors, supportive instructors, and possibly gay-straight alliance groups as well as Q Centers directly on campus or in the community.

Set up a meeting with your local LGBTQIA+ community groups to discuss implementing programs, for example, a specialized program, a film screening, a book discussion, etc. LGBTQIA+ populations are often misrepresented, so it is important to research and ask questions. Discuss your goals and ideas, and be open to critiques and suggestions from community members.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Outreach on campus includes everyone from prospective and current students to staff and faculty. Create partnerships with the campus LGBTQIA+ resource center and relevant departments to build a collection and help facilitate an environment that fosters reading, inquiry, and critical thinking.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Many large cities have a LGBTQIA+ center for teens and adults. In smaller and rural areas, it may be valuable to reach out to libraries in nearby cities for support. Partner with LGBTQIA+ friendly businesses to promote local resources. Additionally, many communities have PFLAG chapters.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Consult with a local PFLAG group and consider doing a presentation to your parent teacher association on materials related to the LGBTQIA+ community. Ensure that school staff, especially nurses and counselors, are aware that the library holds materials to support LGBTQIA+ students. Partner with local Gay & Sexualities Alliance groups to offer book talking for younger students.

Programming

Providing LGBTQIA-friendly programming helps your community know that you are welcoming and accepting. Create programs or displays to promote the following events:

- International Transgender Day of Visibility (March 31)
- National Day of Silence (April, day varies by year)
- Harvey Milk Day (May 22)
- Rainbow Book Month™ (June): <https://www.ala.org/rt/rrt/rainbow-book-month>
- LGBT History Month (October)
- National Coming Out Day (October 11)
- Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20)
- World AIDS Day (December 1)

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS AND TIPS FOR PROGRAMMING INCLUDE:

- Hosting LGBTQIA+ authors and speakers from LGBTQIA+ organizations. This signals that the library is interested in serving LGBTQIA+ people.
- Screening a LGBTQIA-friendly movie (pursuant to licensing rights).
- Implementing the right pace for change; determine what is best for your community and the pace at which you include programming - consider consulting the Martin & Murdock (2007) publication listed below for specific information.
- At public libraries, holding inclusive story times and children's activities utilizing LGBTQIA-friendly picture books.

Recommended Reading

GLBT Programming at the Dallas Public Library: Lessons Learned by Catherine Ritchie, David Fettke and Dale McNeill. Public Libraries, March/April 2008, 50-54.

Library Service to Special Population Children and Their Caregivers: A Toolkit for Librarians and Library Workers: <https://alair.ala.org/bitstream/handle/11213/17559/lsspcc-toolkit-2015.pdf>

Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Teens: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians by Hillians J. Martin, Jr., and James R. Murdock. Neal-Schuman publishers, Inc., 2007.

Collection and Collection Development

The collection is the heart of the library and should represent the diversity in the entire community and should include materials for queer and questioning library users.

- Consider the following ALA (2010) policy which states that “The American Library Association stringently and unequivocally maintains that libraries and librarians have an obligation to resist efforts that systematically exclude materials dealing with any subject matter, including sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.”
- Every library should have a collection development policy covering their collection. Sample collection development policies are available online at the RRT website: <https://www.ala.org/rt/rrt/popularresources/collection>. Another useful tool for creating or amending collection development policies can be found in the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, Martin Garnar & Trina Magi, editors, 2021.
- A good library collection will include fiction and non-fiction, informative and entertaining materials, graphic novels, audio books, videos, etc., for GLGBTQIA+ library users of all ages. If your library has e-books/e-audio books in its collection, include a core collection of LGBTQIA+ materials.
- Annual bibliographies of LGBTQIA+ materials are available from the Rainbow Round Table of the American Library Association (RRT). The *Rainbow Book List* for LGBTQIA+ books (for youth 0-18) and the *Over the Rainbow Books* (for adults) highlight some of the year’s best fiction and nonfiction. The Stonewall Book Awards, the oldest award for LGBTQIA+ literature, also recognizes adult, young adult, and children’s fiction and nonfiction. There are also other LGBTQIA+ organizations which give book awards such as Lambda Literary and Publishing Triangle. The size of the

library isn’t necessarily a factor in collecting LGBTQIA+ materials. One study conducted by Loverich and Degnan (1999) found that many smaller libraries held more Stonewall Book Award winning titles than larger libraries.

LGBTQIA+ Book Awards and Book Lists

- Stonewall Book Awards: <https://www.ala.org/rt/rrt/award/stonewall/>
- Rainbow Book List: <https://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/>
- Over the Rainbow Book List: <https://www.glbtrt.ala.org/overtherainbow/>

Titles for a Basic Non-Fiction LGBTQIA+ Collection

Many Librarians are not sure where to start when it comes to collecting materials for the LGBTQIA+ community. Visit <https://www.ala.org/rt/rrt/bibliographies> for bibliographies on various topics. The bibliographies are not exhaustive, but serve as a starting point. The bibliographies will be updated regularly and will try to remain balanced in its approach of topics for LGBTQIA+ customers. As you collect materials remember that having only a few books on a topic is better than not having none at all. You can also add a variety of popular titles from the most current Stonewall Book Award, Rainbow Book list and Over the Rainbow Book list.

LGBTQIA+ Collection Development Resources

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- *Rainbow Family Collections: Selecting and Using Children’s Books with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content* by Jaime Campbell Naidoo. Libraries Unlimited, 2012.
- Dorr, Christina H., Liz Deskins, and Jamie C. Naidoo. *LGBTQAI+ Books for Children and Teens: Providing a Window for all*. ALA Editions, Chicago, 2018.

FOR TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

- *Top 250 LGBTQ Books for Teens: Coming Out, Being Out, and the Search for Community* by Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins. Huron Street Press, 2015.
- *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content 1969-2004* by Michael Cart & Christine Jenkins. Scarecrow Press, 2006.
- *Queer Books for Teens (2000-2020)*: <http://queerbooksforteens.com/>

FOR ADULTS

- *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Literature: a Genre Guide* by Ellen Bosman, John Bradford, Robert Ridinger. Libraries Unlimited, 2008.

Cataloging

Library users utilize terms they are comfortable applying to themselves when searching the catalog. Subject headings and call numbers have not always been LGBTQIA-friendly, however, librarians have advocated for improved terminology over time. “Intersex people” and “Transgender people” were added as Library of Congress subject headings in 2007. Periodically reviewing the catalog for offensive subject

headings is vital; language is continually evolving, and catalogers should remain current with terminology.

Libraries have made recent efforts to reclassify call numbers to place LGBTQIA+ materials among appropriate sections related to health, family, and relationships, rather than under “abnormal or deviant sexual behavior.” LGBTQIA+ materials should be classified in their proper places. To avoid controversy, some libraries choose their own classification numbers to avoid shelving children’s and fiction materials in nonfiction sections. Include materials in areas designated for the genre and audiences of the same age.

Labeling

The ALA’s *Labeling and Rating Systems: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights* (2015) cautions against labeling. Identifying books with a LGBTQIA+ label may prevent library users from accessing them for fear of being outed. Interfiling LGBTQIA+ materials can be a positive move for libraries; when these materials are placed alongside other books and materials, LGBTQIA+ users feel welcomed and not ostracized.

Collection Challenges

Objections or challenges to library materials occur, and challenges to LGBTQIA+ materials are common. Before a challenge occurs, ensure that your staff understands challenge procedures. Each library should have a collection development policy as well as a policy for handling challenges to materials.

Don’t preempt a challenge by avoiding purchasing LGBTQIA+ materials. Library users have a right to materials that meet their needs, and libraries should provide them. Challenges are not about libraries being right or wrong; instead, it is an opportunity for the library to educate the public about the vital role we play in meeting the information needs of diverse communities.

The ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom should be contacted for help when materials are challenged. Additionally, many state library associations have Intellectual Freedom Committees; contact members of these committees for valuable informational resources.

- ALA Challenge Support: <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport>
- Dealing with Challenges to Young Adult Materials: <https://www.ala.org/yalsa/profdev/yachallenges>
- Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries: <https://standards.aasl.org/project/lgbtq/>

LGBTQIA+ Library Staff

Many libraries have LGBTQIA+ staff members. It may seem appropriate to ask their assistance with LGBTQIA-related efforts or to assign them to LGBTQIA+ outreach efforts. Before doing this, ask the staff member in confidence. Some members of the LGBTQIA+ community prefer to keep their professional and personal lives separate, especially in smaller communities. In the workforce, LGBTQIA+ employees may not want to be treated as tokens or any differently from their colleagues. Libraries should adopt

policies that prohibit discrimination and promote an atmosphere of inclusivity.

Recommended Reading

Out Behind the Desk: Workplace Issues for LGBTQ Librarians, edited by Tracy Nectoux. Library Juice Press, 2011.

Conclusion

In a 2021 press release, ALA's Executive Board and the Boards of Directors for all of ALA's eight divisions stated that "We are committed to defending the constitutional rights of all individuals of all ages to use the resources and services of libraries. We champion and defend the freedom to speak, the freedom to publish, and the freedom to read, as promised by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States." In keeping with that mission, libraries have the responsibility to provide information and to serve all

library users to the best of their ability. We invite you to join us in welcoming your LGBTQIA+ library users into the library through the provision of materials, services, and programs that speak to them, meet their needs, and will help them realize their full potential. LGBTQIA+ library users need the same services provided to all library users: access to information and excellent customer service. We hope this toolkit will help you serve them well.

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