

Op/Ed on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries Today

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In 2018, the newly created Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques created an Intellectual Freedom Committee, the successor to CLA's Intellectual Freedom Advisory Committee. This committee and its predecessor have conducted the annual Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey since 2007 and continue to contribute annual reports on challenges to intellectual freedom in Canadian libraries to both the CFLA-FCAB website and to Freedom to Read Week. Importantly, both committees have played a key role in shaping the intellectual freedom policy environment for Canadian libraries.

Intellectual freedom, the ability of people to have access to the information they need to live, play, and understand the world around them, including current social and political issues, has long been at the core of the mission of librarians. The striving to create more perfect libraries that serve all segments of our society has revealed social and political lapses and, to some extent, has reflected them. But the project has never been abandoned.

Today we see the project under some stress, both from within and from without our profession. These are not easy times, the demands of social justice on the one hand and the resistance to the changes that social justice requires on the other, place libraries and librarians at the centre of the conflict—not a comfortable position. Much of the discourse seems less about engaging with varying views than with attempting to out-shout them, which makes intelligent consideration more difficult.

Libraries in the Atlantic Provinces have typically reported few incidents to the Challenges Survey; about one every two years, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador reporting none since 2006. Speculation on the cause of this lack is futile, but one can only hope that most incidents have been reported and that none have been held back. Some will hope that the most strident of the intellectual currents washing over Canada these days will bypass this region, but the Freedom Convoy has demonstrated that borders are quite porous in this respect.

It seems prudent, then, that APLA move to establish a committee or working group to act as a forum for the discussions that seem to be imminent and to advise the association on matters related to intellectual freedom. The BC Library Association has long had a similar committee and it is presently an active forum for discussion. In addition, as school libraries are becoming a focus, APLA should also renew its outreach to teacher-librarians whose clientele overlaps with that of the public libraries in their area. We are all in this together.

While CFLA-FCAB defers to provincial and regional associations when dealing with provincial and regional questions such as government funding, unless assistance is requested, its Intellectual Freedom

Committee stands ready to assist libraries as they deal with conflicts around collections and programming. With the revision to the CFLA-FCAB website now underway, the IFC will be providing reports, statements, and a toolkit that will assist libraries and their associations in this context.

Contact information

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Reports on the **CFLA-FCAB** website (to be updated) are [here](#).

Contact the BCLA IFC co-chairs: **Wendy Wright** and **Deb Thomas** through the website [here](#).

Review the **Challenges Survey** (Version française disponible) [here](#).

Contribute to the **Challenges Survey** by reporting incidents (Version française disponible) [here](#).