

ALA, ARL, ACRL Host Meeting of Experts to Discuss Google Book Search Settlement

Members of library community discussed the implications of the Google Book Search settlement in a meeting hosted on February 9, 2009 in Washington, D.C. by the American Library Association Washington Office, the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of College & Research Libraries. Under the settlement, Google and the American Association of Publishers and Authors Guild resolve their legal dispute over the scanning of millions of books provided by research libraries. The settlement still requires approval of the presiding judge.

Although this is a private settlement, the result has very real implications for public policy and the way libraries of all types will operate. The mission of libraries is to provide the broadest public access to the use of information, and the library community has a long history of advocating for laws and policies that protect the rights of library users. Because of the complexity of the agreement, its potential long-term impact on libraries, thus user interests, and the enormity of the book collection involved, many librarians have raised questions about the settlement's impact.

Issues raised at the meeting that members believe are of key concern to libraries include:

-Access. What will the settlement mean for protecting the public's ability to access and use digital resources from the nation's libraries? Since the Book Rights Registry established as a condition of the settlement will represent the interests of the authors and publishers, who will represent the interests of libraries and the public? What are the financial implications of participation? Could the settlement create a monopoly that threatens the mission of libraries by raising the prices to an unreasonable level that limits public access?

-Privacy. What will reader privacy look like in a Google subscription-based world? Will the years of hard-fought effort to protect library users' confidentiality be compromised as a for-profit company has new capabilities to monitor and track user reading habits under this settlement?

-Intellectual freedom. Are there academic freedom issues to consider? What are the implications of Google's ability to remove works at its discretion? Will there be notification of their removal? What are the issues regarding possible access and use restrictions on the Research Corpus?

-Equitable treatment. Since not all libraries are addressed in the settlement, what impact will it have on the diverse landscape of libraries? In light of tight economic times, will this negatively affect libraries with lean budgets? Will it expand the digital divide?

-Terms of use. Under the terms of the agreement, will library users continue to enjoy the same rights to information under copyright and other laws? Will the settlement impact the legal discussions and interpretations of library exceptions that allow for library lending, limited copying and preservation?

Next, the executive boards and other leadership bodies of the library associations will consider a number of options available to them to have their voices heard in this debate. To stay posted on the latest developments of the associations' next steps, see www.ala.org/washoff; www.arl.org; and www.ala.org/acrl.