

INTRODUCTION

Libraries hold in their collections resources that constitute or reflect a vast array of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions (TCEs).¹ TCEs are integral to the cultural and social identities of indigenous and local communities that produce them. They embody know-how and skills; they transmit core values and beliefs. Their protection is related to the promotion of creativity, enhanced cultural diversity and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Because TCEs play a special role in the communities that create them, libraries must manage and care for these materials in a manner that recognizes the unique qualities and concerns of their owners. Many indigenous and local communities struggle with the preservation of their culture while others may marginalize or ignore its importance. As a result, preserving and providing access to these cultural materials is significant and complex.

Libraries provide access to much of the world's intellectual creativity and cultural accomplishments. This practice of librarianship is reflected in eleven Core Values identified by the American Library Association (ALA).² Among the core values are access, diversity, intellectual freedom, preservation, service and social responsibility. Together, these values address librarians' responsibility to meet the information needs of library users of all kinds by providing equitable access to a wide range of resources and services, and by supporting individual expression as a tenet of intellectual freedom.

The five concept areas addressed in this document are central to the topic of collecting, preserving, organizing and accessing TCEs. They represent the relationship between libraries and TCEs as a holistic cycle. This cycle begins with the understanding of the cultural meaning and context in which these expressions are created. Thus, the mission of the library relating to TCEs must be reflected in activities that recognize and respect these meanings and contexts. The central activity of the library is defined as one of stewardship—the respectful caretaking of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. Therefore, librarians, indigenous peoples and other tradition-bearers must establish frameworks designed to balance reciprocity and collaboration in the stewardship of these cultural heritage collections.

¹ Traditional cultural expressions defined as, but not limited to, music, art, designs, names, signs, symbols, performances, architectural forms, handicrafts and narratives.

² See ALA Core Values at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues.cfm>

Meaning and Social Context

- Traditional knowledge and cultural expressions exist and are created within an indigenous or folk cultural environment that reflects culturally-specific meanings—cultural history, spirituality, artistic expression, respect for the land, and continuity of culture.
- Librarians must recognize that such materials do not exist separately from the living peoples whose cultures they reflect.
- Tradition-bearers are the living repositories of cultural heritage and their traditional cultural expressions are part of their daily lives and hold great power and meaning for their communities.
- Librarians must understand that cultural knowledge and cultural objects exist and hold power within the frameworks of indigenous or traditional folk communities' worldviews.
- Traditional cultural expressions and traditional knowledge are often communally owned rather than attributed to individuals.
- Librarians should elicit the meaning and social context of traditional cultural expressions in their care from the communities that created the expressions.

Respect, Recognition, Understanding

- Libraries must respect the ownership rights of the tradition-bearers who practice traditional knowledge and create traditional cultural expressions that may be held in library collections.
- Libraries should develop collections reflective of local needs. For instance, when collecting materials on Native peoples, librarians should make a concerted attempt to acquire materials written, produced, illustrated and/or directed by those indigenous peoples.
- While libraries traditionally support equitable access to information, they must balance this responsibility with respect toward access guidelines and protocols developed by tribal communities and tradition-bearers.
- Libraries should educate their patrons on the ethical use of documentary materials that reflect traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

Responsibility

- Indigenous and local communities should define what is public or social

knowledge and what is private or sacred knowledge. These tradition-bearers must establish the protocols for access to information dependent on cultural status, gender, age, and other factors.

- Indigenous peoples and other tradition-bearers have a moral responsibility to protect their communities and control access to sensitive cultural materials.
- Librarians have a responsibility for developing policies and protocols for preservation and use of traditional cultural expressions according to the cultural values of indigenous and local communities.

Reciprocity and Collaboration

- Libraries must collaborate with indigenous and local communities on a continuing basis to maintain a dynamic and reciprocal relationship that guides acquisition, preservation, and access to traditional cultural expressions.
- Libraries have a responsibility to share indigenous and local community guidelines on access and use of traditional knowledge and cultural expressions with their users.
- Libraries should collaborate with indigenous and local communities to identify potential misuse of traditional cultural expressions.

Stewardship

- Libraries should continue to play an active role in using technology to preserve and provide access to intellectual content.³ Librarians should share this expertise with those communities who choose to preserve and access the cultural heritage that remains in their care.
- Libraries must be particularly sensitive to the fact that digitizing traditional cultural expressions exposes the content to a world beyond the boundaries of the library, and makes it potentially more vulnerable to misuse.
- Libraries should strive to provide the necessary social and cultural context as well as appropriate use of indigenous materials in their collections.

³ For more information on library values and activities in digital environments, see <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/wo/referenceab/principles/principles.cfm>

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- Library staff should engage in continuing education to stay abreast of issues surrounding the stewardship of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions

CONCLUSION

Librarians are professionals with a social responsibility to provide and promote public access to information. We also recognize the distinctive needs and circumstances of the cultural communities we serve. We embrace and respect the diversity of these communities.

The special sensitivity and care TCEs require do not conflict with the fundamental tenets of librarianship. These principles serve as a reminder of core library values and our mission to provide access without sacrificing individual liberty or respect for cultural differences.

Embracing these principles advances the librarian's role as a steward of knowledge and cultural heritage. Consensus within the library community will establish the library's voice as one of reason and respect in national and international conversations regarding the access and protection of these unique creative works.

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