

(International/IFLA-) Code of Ethics for Librarians

Draft
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PREAMBLE

This Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is offered as a series of ethical propositions for the guidance of individual librarians as well as other information workers, and for the consideration of Library and Information Associations when creating or revising their own codes.

The function of codes of ethics can be described as

- encouraging reflection on principles on which librarians and other information workers can form policies and handle dilemmas
- improving professional self consciousness
- providing transparency to users and society in general.

It is not intended to replace existing codes or to remove the obligation on professional associations to develop their own codes through a process of research, consultation and cooperative drafting.

This code is offered in the belief that:

Librarianship is, in its very essence, an ethical activity embodying a value-rich approach to professional work with information.

Human beings are physically weak, but intellectually powerful. From the earliest times they have necessarily organised themselves socially so as to survive and prosper. In society they have shared resources, work and information.

The need to share ideas and information has grown more important with the increasing complexity of society in recent centuries and this provides a rationale for libraries and the practice of librarianship.

The role of information institutions and professionals, including libraries and librarians, in modern society is to optimise the recording and representation of information and the provision of access to it. Information service in the interest of the common good is thus at the heart of librarianship.

Furthermore, this belief in the human necessity of sharing information and ideas implies the recognition of information rights. The idea of human rights, particularly as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), requires us all to recognise and acknowledge the humanity of others and to respect their rights. In particular, Article 19, which sets out rights of freedom of opinion and expression for all human beings.

Article 19 expressly sets out a right to “Seek, receive and impart information and ideas in any media and regardless of frontiers” which provides a clear rationale for libraries and the practice of modern and progressive librarianship. IFLA in statements, manifestos and policy and technical documents too numerous to list has expanded the understanding of work with information.

Implicit in this work is the idea of information rights and their significance for the profession and society generally. The emphasis on information rights in turn obliges librarians and other information workers to develop a principled critique of relevant law and to be prepared to advise and, if appropriate, advocate the improvement of both the substance and administration of laws.

The clauses of this code of ethics build on the core principles outlined in this preamble to provide a set of suggestions on the conduct of professionals. IFLA recognises that whilst these core principles should remain at the heart of any such code, the specifics of codes will necessarily vary according to the particular society, community of practice or virtual community. Code making is an essential function of a professional association, just as ethical reflection is a necessity for all professionals. IFLA recommends the Code of Ethics for IFLA to all its member associations and institutions and to individual librarians and information workers for these purposes. Furthermore IFLA undertakes to revise this code whenever appropriate.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The core mission of librarians, other information workers and their institutions is to ensure access to information for all for personal development, education, cultural enrichment, economic activity and informed participation in and enhancement of democracy.

Librarians, other information workers and their institutions reject the denial and restriction of access to information and ideas most particularly through censorship whether by states, governments, or religious or civil society institutions. Policies on collection development and access to information should be made explicit, transparent and freely available.

Libraries offering services to the public should make every endeavour to offer access to their collections and services free of cost to the user. If membership fees and administrative charges are inevitable, they should be kept as low as possible, and practical solutions found so that socially disadvantaged people are not excluded.

Librarians, other information workers and their institutions promote and publicise their collection and services so that users and prospective users are aware of their existence and availability. Information professionals and their institutions use the most effective ways to make the material accessible to all. The websites of libraries and related institutions should comply with international standards for accessibility and access to them should not be subject to barriers.

USERS' RIGHTS

In order to provide inclusion and eradicate discrimination, librarians shall ensure that the right of accessing information is not denied for reasons such as age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental disability, gender, immigration legal status, marital status, origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Librarians and their institutions shall establish policies to guide the provision of equitable access and services to all customers including individuals and groups, agencies, institutions and organizations, native and foreign-speakers, and those who need access to information in various formats.

Librarians and their institutions shall uphold individuals' rights to privacy and confidentiality regarding access to information in any format, and services provided and/or, used.

Librarians shall provide unbiased services reflecting respect for users and equal access to information.

Librarians organize and present content in a way that allows an autonomous user to find the information he/she needs. Librarians help and support their users in their information search.

PRIVACY, SECRECY AND TRANSPARENCY

Librarians and their institutions promote openness of access to ideas and the maximum transparency for information that is compatible with good governance and human rights.

They respect the personal privacy of all, except where it is in the public interest that misconduct, corruption and crime be exposed. Furthermore they respect the protection of personal data, necessarily shared between individuals and institutions.

Librarians support transparency so that the workings of government, administration and business are exposed to the scrutiny of the general public, whose lives are vitally affected by those workings thereby holding these entities accountable for their action.

Librarians recognise that from time to time principled enforcement of unwilling transparency in the form of leaks by whistleblowers will further the values of civil society, whether revelations are in strict conformity to law, regulations and contracts or not.

At the same time librarians recognise that there is a legitimate sphere of government, business and industrial secrecy that will under certain circumstances and for limited periods of time restrict access to carefully defined and limited categories and items of information, and the role of librarians serving government agencies and corporations may from time to time contribute towards such necessary concealment.

Librarians respect confidentiality agreements taken on behalf of the library and between third parties while ensuring that such agreements do not go beyond that aforementioned "legitimate sphere" The relationship between the library and the user is to be regarded as one of confidentiality and librarians

will take appropriate measures to ensure that user data is not shared beyond the original transaction.

Librarians will develop a critique of laws and regulations relating to privacy, secrecy and transparency, in the interests of enhancing legal and regulatory regimes in line with the principles set out above.

NEUTRALITY, PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Librarians are strictly committed to neutrality and an unbiased stance regarding collection, access and service. Neutrality results in the most balanced collection and the most balanced access to information achievable. Librarians use clear criteria for selection of information and media. They define and publish their policies for selection, organisation, preservation, provision, and dissemination of information.

Librarians distinguish between their personal convictions and professional duties. They do not advance private interests or personal beliefs at the expense of neutrality.

Librarians counter corruption directly affecting librarianship, as in the sourcing and supply of library materials, appointments to library posts and administration of library contracts and finances.

Librarians strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing their knowledge and skills, and by encouraging the professional development of their colleagues. They aim at the highest standards of service quality and thus promote the positive reputation of the profession.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Librarians and their institutions are involved in social, cultural and economic well-being and therefore they have social responsibility.

Librarians and their institutions contribute to the processes of emancipation of underprivileged groups in society. By their professional conduct and their services librarians support inclusion and integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants; they provide equitable services for socially disadvantaged and physically and mentally disabled persons.

Librarians and their institutions offer services to increase the reading skills of people. They support their users' ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and create, use and communicate information. They aim at improving their users' information literacy by offering e.g. courses and tutorials which moreover promote the ethical use of information and thereby help to prevent plagiarism.

Librarians respect the language minorities of a country and their right to access information in their own language.

Librarians observe the principles of the protection of minors while ensuring this does not impact on the information rights of adults.

OPEN ACCESS AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Librarians and their institutions are partners of authors, publishers and other creators of copyright protected works. Librarians' interest is to provide the best possible access for library users to information and ideas in any media or format.

Librarians will promote the principles of Open Access, Open Source, Open licenses and other means of providing fair, swift, economical and effective access to information for users.

Librarians recognise the intellectual property right of authors and other creators and will seek to ensure that their moral rights are respected as completely as possible so that they get the recognition that their creativity deserves.

Librarians also recognise that creators deserve financial reward for their creativity and therefore support the protection of their copyright protected works offered by Article 27 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Librarians will negotiate the most favourable licence and purchase terms for access to works with rights holders, on behalf of their users and seek to ensure that access is not unnecessarily prevented or hindered by the mode of administration of intellectual property laws.

It is the duty of the library and information profession in individual countries to develop a critical analysis of the applicable intellectual property regime, nationally and internationally, and to advocate for change and improvement when appropriate. It is also the profession's duty to advocate for exceptions and limitations to copyright restrictions for libraries.

Librarians will seek to encourage governments to establish an intellectual property regime that favours the development and protection of creativity, and to negotiate international trade agreements that are not injurious to an author of a literary or artistic work.

Librarians should also advocate that copyright restrictions should not be expanded beyond a reasonable time limitation.

Librarians ensure that information that has fallen in the public domain remains public and free.

COLLEAGUE AND EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP

Librarians shall treat each other with fairness and respect.

Employers shall not discriminate in any aspect of employment because of age, citizenship, political belief, physical or mental disability, gender, marital status, origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Employers shall provide working conditions promoting equal opportunities for all librarians. Librarians shall have the right to free speech in the workplace provided it does not infringe on the principle of neutrality vis-a-vis the users.

Employers shall provide equal payment and benefits for men and women holding similar types of jobs.

Librarians shall be ready to share their professional experience with colleagues.

Librarians shall help and guide young professionals to enter professional community.

Librarians shall comply with the principle of confidentiality of personal information in relations with colleagues.

Librarians strive to earn own reputation by means of professionalism and moral characters, does not use unfair methods of competition.