

Challenge Response Checklist for LGBTQ+ Exhibits and Programming in Libraries

This checklist is designed to help public and academic librarians prepare for and respond to challenges related to LGBTQ+ history exhibits and programs. All strategies align with current best practices recommended by professional associations and public institutions.

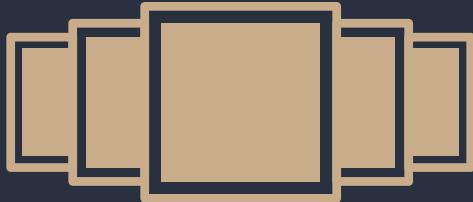
Leveraging LGBTQ+ History Exhibits to Build Inclusive, Resilient Communities

1 Institutional Readiness

- Review and update the library's collection development and exhibit policies to explicitly include diversity, equity, and inclusion (American Library Association, 2019).
- Ensure all policies are publicly accessible and referenced in promotional materials when needed.
- Prepare a brief talking points document aligned with your mission and the ALA's Library Bill of Rights (ALA, 2022).
- Establish a review committee protocol for handling complaints (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2022).

2 Staff Preparation

- Offer staff training on responding to censorship and patron concerns respectfully and effectively (ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom).
- Conduct a staff-wide review of intellectual freedom principles and the difference between inclusion and endorsement.
- Practice clear, values-based messaging: "Our mission is to ensure access to information for everyone in our community."



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3 Exhibit Framing and Messaging

- Position the exhibit within the context of broader educational goals (e.g., historical learning, civic education).
- Use neutral, institutional language in signage and press materials ("traveling exhibit on LGBTQ+ history," not "activist display").
- Frame the exhibit as part of your library's commitment to inclusion and intellectual freedom.

4 Community Engagement

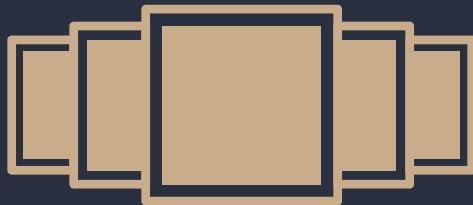
- Identify local partners (e.g., LGBTQ+ orgs, historical societies, university departments) for shared messaging and support.
- Brief "Friends of the Library" and other stakeholders on how to help manage public discourse.
- Plan a public program or discussion event to contextualize the exhibit and encourage civil engagement.

5 Responding to Complaints

- Acknowledge the concern and refer to established policy: "We appreciate your feedback. This exhibit was selected according to our policy, which supports access to diverse perspectives."
- Offer a written form for formal complaints, and ensure all responses are reviewed through proper internal processes.
- Do not remove or alter exhibits prematurely without committee review.

6 Legal and Ethical Framework

- Familiarize leadership with recent federal rulings striking down censorship laws:
 - Iowa (March 27, 2025): <https://www.iowapublicradio.org/ipr-news/2025-03-27/federal-judge-strikes-down-iowas-law-banning-books-depicting-sex-acts-from-school-libraries-again>
 - Arkansas (Dec. 23, 2024): <https://www.kark.com/news/state-news/federal-judicial-ruling-overturns-parts-of-arkansas-library-obscenity-law/>
- Monitor ongoing ALA advocacy efforts challenging censorship and defunding efforts: <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom>



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7 Documentation and Evaluation

- Maintain documentation of all complaints, responses, and decisions.
- Review and evaluate the impact and reception of exhibits post-program.
- Update future planning documents to incorporate lessons learned.

Key Resources

ALA Library Bill of Rights: <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom: <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif>

International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Guidelines on Public Access: <https://www.ifla.org/resources/guidelines-on-public-access/>

Speaking from Your Values

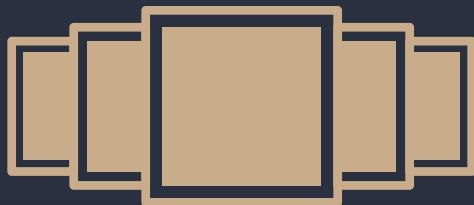
- ▲ “[Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)” (2018) by American Library Association
- ▲ “[Out and proud: Why it is important to learn your LGBT history](#)” (2016) by Dr. Warren J. Blumenfeld
- ▲ “[How to Understand Your Values](#)” by Joshua Fields Millburn



GLAAD created Book Bans - A Guide for Community Response and Action for communities to defeat book ban attempts, and send a powerful signal of welcome and acceptance.
<https://glaad.org/publications/book-bans-a-guide-for-community-response-and-action/>

When it Comes to Challenges

- ▲ “[How to Respond to Challenges and Concerns about Library Resources](#)”, American Library Association, 2018
- ▲ “[De-Escalation Techniques for Real-Life Programming Scenarios](#)”, Hannah Arata (ALA Public Programs Office), 2022
- ▲ “[Hateful Conduct in Libraries: Proactive Preparation](#)”, American Library Association, 2018
- ▲ “[Responding to and Preparing for Controversial Programs and Speakers Q&A](#)”, American Library Association, 2018
- ▲ “[Managing Challenges and Controversies](#)” Deborah Caldwell-Stone (ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom), 2024



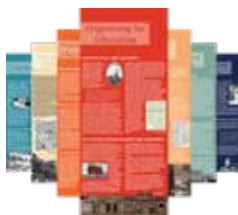
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Global LGBT Journeys through Time and Identity

I write and design community-based history exhibits to empower people to see their lives as chapters in a long, queer story that will never end.



Through Science to Justice
Legacies of LGBT people in STEM



Flyover Country
LGBT activism firsts in the Midwest



Decolonizing Queerness
Homophobia as a Legacy of Colonialism



Blossom & Wilt
Queerness under Fascism



The Stonewall Inn
The Riot that Sparked a Movement



The Power Here Is You
Milwaukee's Response to AIDS



Meet Vince

At the beginning of Pride Month 2024, Vince Tripi founded Expanding Horizons, a social-purpose business that offers traveling exhibits, talks, and curricula designed to celebrate diversity and foster pride in LGBTQ+ heritage. Vince is a passionate advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, dedicated to preserving its history and promoting a sense of belonging.

His notable achievements include being named Advocate of the Year by the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce, a top 25 Emerging Training Leader by Training magazine, and receiving the Distinguished Service Award from UW-Milwaukee's LGBT Resource Center.

He serves on the board of directors of Milwaukee Pride, Inc.