Public Librarians’ Chat
DEVELOPING CONDUCT POLICIES
GUEST PRESENTER: ANDREW MURPHY
Denver Public Library Works to Improve Library Safety

- City records revealed a sharp increase in 911 service calls from the Denver Library. Denver 911 received 18 calls for assaults and fights at the library in just four months in 2017.

- Sexual assault calls from the library have also increased by 83 percent.

- But the highest increase in calls was for overdoses. There were 44 calls for overdoses in the first four months in 2017. Last year there were zero.

- Library responded with increased police presence and narcan kits.
New Trends in Library Security

- Vaping and marijuana
- “Religious” panhandlers
- Religious-centered confrontations
- Unsatisfied tax advice seekers
- Ransomware attacks
- Legal concealed weapons
- Service animals vs. emotional comfort animal

Safe Environment Begins with…

- Designated Person-in-Charge
- Post emergency phone list at all service desks
- Have a Code of Conduct Policy
- Post “Rules of Conduct”
Speaking of signs,...

- Please turn **OFF** your cell phone!
- **NO CELL PHONE USE IN THE LIBRARY!**
  Thank you for your cooperation!
  
  Library Director

- **DO NOT** CHEW ON THE HEADPHONE CORDS
  These headphones are provided as a courtesy so you child can play the games with sound.
  If they are damaged, they will no longer be provided.
“Problem patron” or patron with a problem?
Handling Confrontation
Proactive Outreach

MONDAYS & FRIDAYS
10AM-6PM

The social work intern can help answer these questions!

- Available for questions on the 3rd floor
- OR stop by the table at the front entrance from 12pm-2pm (Mon. & Fri.)
- OR call or e-mail to schedule a time to talk!

907-343-2911
BarkerRC@muni.org

Where can I find HOUSING?
Where can I find FOOD?
Where can I find COUNSELING?
Where can I find A JOB?
Information on ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS?
Policies, Procedures, and Practice

Loud Eating in the Library!
https://youtu.be/mPh9jZVUK0
Why are policies important?

- Support the mission, service roles, goals, and objectives of the library;
- Clarify relationships and responsibilities within the organization;
- Delegate authority by transferring decision making to lower levels of the organization;
- Guide acquisitions of library materials;
- Protect the rights of individuals inside and outside the organization and;
- Protect the organization and its legal authority in case of litigation
Policy Process

- Policy development often originates with the library director
- Policy making process should involve all levels of staff
- Library Board reviews, if necessary revises, and approves
  - Advisory
  - Governing
- Library Director informs staff and public of the policy
- Library Board reviews policy periodically
Validity Tests for Policies

- **Legality**: Does the policy conform to current law? Changes in the law often precipitate policy review.

- **Reasonableness**: Is the policy reasonable? Many policies, although legal on the surface, could be successfully challenged if they are unreasonable.

- **Nondiscriminatory application**: Can the policy be enforced in a nondiscriminatory manner? Policies must be applied fairly to all patron.

- **Measurability**: Is the enforcement of the policy measurable? It is difficult to enforce a policy fairly if the behavior specified or prohibited by the policy is not quantifiable.
Effective Policies

- Reflective of the mission, roles and objectives of the organization
- Consistent, in order to maintain efficiency and fairness
- Flexible, to allow some latitude in interpretation
- Supported by procedures and rules,
- Clearly written
- Fully discussed with staff
- Appealable through an established mechanism.
Resources


Resources


Resources


Writing new policies: background
Library values

- Libraries are for everyone
- Libraries have an ethical obligation to make library resources available to everyone
- The ALA promotes removing all barriers to library and information services for people living in poverty
Writing new policies: background

Kreimer V. Morristown

- Kreimer sued Free Public Library of Morristown, NJ in 1990
- A Federal court ruled the Library violated Kreimer’s First Amendment rights by denying him access to information for poor hygiene
- Judge Sarokin said, “Society has survived not banning books which it finds offensive from its libraries; it will survive not banning persons whom it likewise finds offensive from its libraries.”
- The ruling was reversed by a Federal appeals panel recognizing the Library as a limited public forum
- The different views of the Judge and Appeals panel centered around the vague language of the policy
Writing new policies: research

- Analysis of Code of Conduct library policies from 100 most populated cities in USA
- Analysis of public records of incident reports from 40 public libraries when people were evicted for odor issues
Writing new policies: findings

Sleeping

- 90% of libraries prohibit sleeping as ‘disruptive behavior’
- Anaheim Public Library prohibits snoring but not sleeping
- ‘Sleeping that impedes others from using library spaces or resources’ that violates ‘courteous’ behavior - Minneapolis
- ‘Placing head on table for prolonged periods of time’ - Nashville
- Austin Public Library allows people under the age of 10 to sleep
- No library specifically make exceptions for elderly or people with Narcolepsy
Writing new policies: findings
Using restrooms for hygiene

- 79% of libraries forbid ‘Bathing, shaving or washing clothes on the premises’
- Charlotte and Dallas explicitly prohibit people changing clothes in the restroom
- ‘Use restroom facilities properly’ - vague language from Omaha
- ‘Use public restroom for intended purpose only’ - San Antonio
- ‘Restroom sinks shall be used for washing hands and face only’ - San Diego
Writing new policies: findings

Bags & bulky items

- Chicago’s policy asks customers to not ‘Bring in more than two bags or any bag exceeding 36”X18”X12”’ addressing two common traits of the varied policies regarding bags: quantity and size
- 61% of all libraries prohibit bags of some type and 47% of all libraries have a policy related to bags blocking access or taking space
- Wichita Public Library prohibits ‘bags of clothing’
- Orlando and Colorado Springs prohibit ‘garbage bags’
- Nine libraries prohibit plastic bags and three prohibit boxes
- Long Beach Public Library does not allow customers to unpack bags inside the library
Writing new policies: findings
Bedrolls, blankets & sleeping bags

- 30% prohibit bedrolls, blankets & sleeping bags
- Four of these libraries, all located in Texas, do not have a policy regarding bulky bags
- Phoenix prevents people from ‘laying out blankets’
- Orlando allows blankets for children but not adults
Writing new policies: findings

Shopping carts

- 30% forbid shopping carts from library property
- ‘Wheeled conveyances such as wheelchairs and baby strollers/carriages, walkers used for the actual transport of a person or child, as well as wheeled backpacks, book carriers, or other implements for the transport of research and reading material are permitted’ – Santa Ana
- Most libraries use the word ‘grocery’ or ‘shopping’ cart within the policy
Writing new policies: findings

Personal hygiene & odor

- 79% of libraries have a policy regarding odor
- ‘Having personal hygiene that is offensive so as to constitute a nuisance to others’ is most common language
- 11% prohibit clothing odor or ‘unclean clothing’ as Tulsa worded it
- Pima County & Austin include ‘perfume’ as an offensive odor
- Phoenix and Boston forbid ‘unsanitary items’ and ‘garbage, articles with foul odor’
Writing new policies: findings
Monopolizing space & loitering

- 35% of libraries prohibit loitering
- 16% of libraries prohibit ‘monopolizing space’
- Fort Wayne, IN defines loitering as, ‘Individuals who are not using library resources or services’
- San Bernardino Public Library includes ‘walking aimlessly’ in their definition of loitering
- Miami Public Library defines loitering as ‘remaining in the Library without being engaged in purposes for which the Library was opened, such as reading, writing and quiet contemplation’
- ‘Monopolizing library space, seating, tables, stairways or equipment to the exclusion of other patrons.’ – Colorado Springs
Writing new policies: findings
Begging & panhandling

- 85% of libraries prohibit solicitation of any kind
- 32% of libraries use the word ‘begging’ or ‘panhandling’
Writing new policies: findings

Anomalies

- Five libraries prohibit camping or living on property
- Houston Public Library prevents customers from ‘spreading out personal belongings’
- Maricopa County Library District’s Statement of Conduct reads ‘Customers are encouraged to enjoy our libraries while behaving in a manner that does not interfere with the enjoyment of the library by others. Any behavior that is deemed disruptive or destructive to the library and/or the library environment is unacceptable.’
- Memphis deliberately chose not to publicly post policies to make the space more welcoming
Writing new policies: takeaways

- Be mindful of language when writing policies
- Be explicit to avoid disputed interpretation
- Be positive when able and say what is allowed instead of what isn’t allowed
- Always give Library staff authority to make judgment for all policies to avoid subjective interpretation
- Avoid discriminatory language – and try to avoid discriminatory policies!