

August 21, 2025

[Please use this form to submit feedback](#)

ALA Core Values Interpretations: Public Good

Core Value Statement

Public good is working to improve society and protect the rights to education, literacy, and intellectual freedom. Libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies. Library workers provide the highest service levels to create informed, connected, educated, and empowered communities.

Interpretation (DRAFT)

A public good is generally defined as a commodity or service that is provided without profit to all members of a society, either by the government or a private individual or organization, for the benefit or well-being of that society. Public goods have two distinct aspects: nonexcludability and nonrivalrous consumption. Nonexcludability means that the commodity or service is available to everyone, even if they have not paid for it. Nonrivalrous consumption means that use of the commodity or service by one person does not reduce its availability for others.

Libraries are a public good as they offer library services without profit to everyone in their communities, thus benefiting the public. This applies to all types of libraries—public, school, academic, and special—regardless of how they are funded.

Library workers, with the support of library governance, advocates, and collaborators, strive to improve the quality of life in their communities by providing services, collections, and spaces and to protect the following rights of every individual in their communities:

- Education—Everyone has the right to education as stated in Article 26 of the [United Nations Declaration of Human Rights](#).
- Literacy—the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. ([ALA Committee on Literacy's adopted definition](#))

- Intellectual Freedom—the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement can be explored. ([ALA's definition](#))

Libraries are a public good that promotes equity, access, and participation. They responsibly use funding to serve their communities and uphold democratic values by supporting an informed citizenry.

Libraries were established to enhance access to information, education, and civic engagement. They foster informed citizens and support participatory governance through life-long learning as well as engagement spaces.

Libraries, as an essential public good, have a duty to support education, culture, and civic life.

Library staff, with organizational backing, uphold everyone's dignity and rights. They strive to remove biases, address inequity and oppression, promote diversity and inclusion, and further racial and social justice through advocacy, education, collaboration, and resource allocation ([ALA Code of Ethics](#)).

Library workers, supported by governance and advocates, deliver top-quality service to all users through well-organized resources, fair policies, equitable access, and unbiased, courteous responses ([ALA Code of Ethics](#)). These efforts help build informed, connected, and empowered communities.