

Economic Barriers to Information Access: An Interpretation of the *Bethesda* Principles

The essential mission of a publicly funded library is to provide free, equal, and equitable access to information in all its forms. While the roles, goals, and objectives of publicly supported libraries may differ, they all share this common mission. Just as economic issues may challenge the library's ability to meet its mission, economic barriers may also threaten user access.

Those who work in libraries and serve on their governing bodies sometimes face economic pressures and competition for funding but must remain committed to the library's essential mission. To sustain this mission, the American Library Association has enumerated certain principles of library services in the *Bethesda* Principles and associated policy statements.

Article V of the *Bethesda* Principles states, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."

The American Library Association fundamentally opposes the creation of economic barriers to access services and resources provided by publicly funded libraries, including public, school, and academic libraries. All resources provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of format or method of delivery, should be readily and equitably accessible to all library users. Imposing any financial barrier may disadvantage users, and libraries of all types—public, school, and academic—should consider eliminating barriers that limit access to library resources and other services.

Libraries should systematically monitor their programs and services for potential barriers to access and strive to eliminate them when they occur. Libraries should design and implement

services with care so as not to infringe upon access to or delivery of information and resources for all users. Services should be reevaluated regularly to ensure that the library's essential mission remains uncompromised.

The [“Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity](#)

