



# Culturally Responsive Guidelines for Alaska Public Libraries

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## Preface

The Culturally Responsive Guidelines for Alaska Public Libraries were developed by a group of [Alaskan library directors](#)\* at a workshop facilitated by Dr. Lotsee Patterson and sponsored by the Alaska State Library. (Some of these directors have retired or moved onto new positions).

The goal of the workshop was to develop guidelines to help public librarians examine how they respond to the specific informational, educational and cultural needs of their Alaska Native users and communities.

These Guidelines are predicated on the belief that culturally appropriate service to indigenous peoples is a fundamental principle of Alaska public libraries, and that the best professional practices in this regard are associated with culturally responsive services, collections, programs, staff, and overall library environment.

While the impetus for developing the Guidelines was service to the Alaska Native community, as the library directors worked on the Guidelines it became clear that they could be applied other cultural groups resident in Alaska. The Guidelines are presented as basic statements in four broad areas. The statements are not intended to be inclusive, exclusive or conclusive, and thus, should be carefully discussed, considered and adapted to accommodate local circumstances and needs.

The Guidelines may be used to:

- Review mission and vision statements, goals, objectives, and policies to assure the integration of culturally appropriate practice.
- Examine the library environment and atmosphere provided for all library users.
- Review staff performance as it relates to practicing culturally specific behavior.
- Strengthen the commitment to facilitating and fostering the involvement of members of the indigenous community.
- Adapt strategies and procedures to include culturally sensitive library practices.
- Guide preparation, training, and orientation of library staff to help them address the culturally specific needs of their indigenous patrons.
- Serve as a benchmark against which to evaluate library programs, services, and collections.

## Library Environment

A culturally responsive library is open and inviting to all members of the community.

A culturally responsive library utilizes local expertise to provide culturally appropriate displays of arts, crafts, and other forms of decoration and space design.

A culturally responsive library makes use of facilities throughout the community to extend the library's mission beyond the walls of the library.

A culturally responsive library sponsors ongoing activities and events that observe cultural traditions and provide opportunities to display and exchange knowledge of these traditions.

A culturally responsive library involves local cultural representatives in deliberations and decision making for policies and programs.

## Services and Programs

A culturally responsive library holds regular formal and informal events to foster and to celebrate local culture.

Culturally responsive programming involves members from local cultural groups in the planning and presentation of library programs.

Culturally responsive programming and services are based on the expressed needs of the community.

Culturally responsive programming recognizes and communicates the cultural heritage of the local area.

Culturally responsive services reach out and adapt delivery to meet local needs.

## Collections

A culturally sensitive library provides assistance and leadership in teaching users how to evaluate material about cultural groups represented in its collections and programs.

A culturally responsive library purchases and maintains collections that are sensitive to and accurately reflect Native cultures.

A culturally responsive library seeks out sources of materials that may be outside the mainstream publishing and reviewing journals.

A culturally responsive library seeks local community input and suggestions for purchase.

A culturally responsive library incorporates unique elements of contemporary life in Native communities in Alaska, such as food gathering activities and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), into its collection.

A culturally responsive library encourages the development and preservation of materials that document and transmit local cultural knowledge.

A culturally responsive library makes appropriate use of diverse formats and technologies to gather and make available traditional cultural knowledge.

A culturally responsive library develops policies for appropriate handling of culturally sensitive materials.

A culturally responsive library reviews its collections regularly to insure that existing materials are relevant and appropriate.

A culturally responsive library collects materials in the languages used in its community when they are available.

## Library Staff

The culturally responsive library reflects the ethnic diversity of the local community in recruitment of library boards, administrators, staff and volunteers

A culturally responsive staff recognizes the validity and integrity of traditional knowledge systems.

Culturally responsive staff is aware of local knowledge and cultural practices and incorporates it into their work. For example, hunting seasons and funeral practices that may require Native staff and patrons to be elsewhere, or eye contact with strangers, talkativeness, or the discipline of children.

A culturally responsive staff is knowledgeable in areas of local history and cultural tradition.

A culturally responsive staff provides opportunities for patrons to learn in a setting where local cultural knowledge and skills are naturally relevant.

A culturally responsive staff utilizes the expertise of Elders and culturally knowledgeable leaders in multiple ways.

A culturally responsive staff will respect the cultural and intellectual property rights that pertain to aspects of local knowledge.

Culturally responsive library staff members participate in local and regional events and activities in appropriate and supportive ways.

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