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A failure to communicate: assessing the low rate of materials challenge and censorship reporting among Canadian public libraries

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A failure to communicate: assessing the low rate of materials challenge and censorship reporting among Canadian public libraries

Record levels of materials challenges have affected libraries in both Canada and the United States in recent years, (American Library Association, 2023c; Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2015-2022), but despite the apparent swell in censorship efforts, the ALA estimates that 82-92% of challenges go unreported (Doyle 2017). This study aims to identify factors contributing to the low rate of challenge reporting through a participation survey distributed to over 500 Canadian public libraries. Results indicate low awareness reporting mechanisms is likely the largest obstacle to greater participation, but obstacles related to library policy, including delegation and challenge policy structure, also exist.

Keywords: banned books, censorship, challenged books, public libraries, intellectual freedom, library policy

Introduction

The recent genesis of a vociferous movement to remove books from library shelves illustrates the library's role as the latest culture war battleground. As activists work to expunge resources they find objectionable from collections, the past two years have seen libraries experience intellectual freedom challenges at record levels. Public and school libraries in the United States have experienced a conspicuous increase in pressure from both non-governmental groups and legislative bodies to remove books on LGBTQIA+ issues and race relations from their collections (Stroshane 2022). In contrast, Canadian libraries in recent years have been more likely to experience challenges to racist and homophobic materials (Nyby 2023), though the trends appear to be shifting. In 2022, school boards in Ontario and British Columbia have grappled with censorship pressure from groups opposed to the presence of books containing "sexual content" in school libraries (Azpiri 2022; Breen and Craggs 2022). Although the pressure on school libraries has received a great deal of publicity, public libraries have not been immune. In addition to a rise in formal challenges to children's and teen resources on the topics of sexuality and gender identity, many libraries were served with a "Notice of Personal Liability" authored by conservative activist group Action4Canada threatening legal action against libraries carrying any title they deemed inappropriate for children (Ellis 2023; CFLA 2022a). In addition to serving notices of liability on library staff, there have been instances of groups petitioning town councils to cease funding to libraries, as experienced by the South Central Regional Library in Winkler, MB (*Pembina Valley Online* 2022).

With this climate as a backdrop, it comes as no surprise that materials challenges reported to both the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) and the American Library Association (ALA) reached record highs in 2021 and again in 2022 ("Book Challenges Expected to Surpass 2021's Record High" 2022; ALA 2023c; CFLA 2015-2022). And yet, both organizations believe the reported data tells only a fraction of the story.

Challenges to materials in libraries are accounted for on two main fronts. The first tool is organization specific; a library may have a policy in place on what to do when a challenge takes place. These policies generally outline the definition of a challenge and the process that the organization has in place to address any challenges to library materials or events. The policy may note various levels of challenge including a discussion with the person making the challenge, a specific form that needs to be submitted outlining the concerns related to the challenge, and the process through which that form and the related material is assessed (e.g. evaluation by the library director/CEO or the library's Board of Governors) to determine the legitimacy of the challenge (ALA 2018)

On the second front are reporting mechanisms available to libraries from professional associations such as the ALA and the CFLA. Both of these organizations provide online forms so that libraries can report challenges they receive to their collections, materials, programs, or policies. Both forms outline a variety of instances or situations that are within the scope of reporting, including challenges to materials within a library's collection or services, challenges related to the provision of internet within the library, challenges to patron privacy or confidentiality, and hate crimes such as defacement of library property to target a specific group, and harassment and intimidation of library staff. The Canadian reporting mechanism is known as the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey (IFCS). It has been active since 2006 and is accessed via the public CFLA website. The IFCS is designed and managed by the CFLA Intellectual Freedom Committee, which exists to support intellectual freedom in Canadian libraries through the creation guidelines, written reports, guidance, and other materials (CFLA 2022b).

Based on three 2011 studies conducted in Oregon, Missouri, and Texas, The ALA estimates that only 3-18% of challenges in the US are reported to the ALA (LaRue 2018). There is no reason to believe that Canadian libraries fare any better. Canadian libraries reported 341 challenges to the CFLA between 2015 and 2021, for an incidence rate of 0.89 challenges per 100,000 population (CFLA 2006-2022). During the same time period, US libraries reported 2,561 challenges to the ALA, an incidence rate of 0.77 challenges per 100,000 population (American Library Association 2023b). Total challenges reported annually in Canada are shown in Table 1. [Table 1 near here]

A more comprehensive dataset that shows a deeper understanding of what is being challenged and how often challenges are happening would provide a useful tool for libraries to better inform themselves about the possibilities and probabilities around having something challenged within the library. Knowledge of how resistance to intellectual freedom manifests and which resources are most likely to incur challenges can inform library policy and outreach in the face of community discord. Additionally, a greater understanding of the phenomenon can help professional associations such as the ALA and the CFLA better support libraries experiencing challenges through the creation of support materials that better reflect the shifting trends of censorship.

Purpose of the study

Given this background, there are questions surrounding how and when the IFCS is utilized and a need to better understand why reporting is lower than it seems it should be. This study aims to examine several possible factors contributing to the incomplete collection of data on intellectual freedom challenges in Canadian public libraries, including knowledge of the IFCS and its scope among library staff, and barriers to participation stemming from policy and practice. Data was gathered via a survey on participation addressing two main areas of concern: library challenge policy and awareness of the IFCS and its scope. Additionally, several questions touch upon library and library worker's attitudes regarding the IFCS and its purpose. The results of the study may help inform CFLA challenge data collection efforts in the future and contribute to the creation of a more complete picture of intellectual freedom issues in Canadian libraries.

Literature Review

Intellectual Freedom Policy

Despite the increasing visibility of challenges to library materials, there is a relative scarcity of research on the subject (Oltmann, Peterson, and Knox 2016). Research focusing on courses of action taken by libraries in the face of challenges tends to be in the form of case studies and reflective essays, providing little insight to the overall picture (Knox 2014). Though no research focusing specifically on the practice of challenge reporting exists, several studies touch on the issue. In a study of Idaho libraries, Monks, Gaines, and Marineau (2014) found that over 10% of library staff who participated in the study did not know if their library had experienced any challenges over the preceding three years, and over a third of participants were not sure if their library kept documentation of challenges. In a study on library staff who reportedly did not experience any materials challenges at all, Oltmann and Reynolds (2020) found that many participants were indeed presented with complaints about library materials, but the patrons ultimately did not file paperwork for a formal complaint. Though both the CFLA and ALA reporting mechanisms are inclusive of challenges of this nature, none of the participating library staff believed these interactions constituted "challenges" as there was no official challenge form submitted. Preer's (2014) survey of collections policies and challenge procedures among Wisconsin libraries found wide discrepancies in the design of challenge processes, the availability and format of challenge forms, and perhaps most notably, inconsistent terminology regarding challenges themselves.

The above research outlines three factors that may account for some of the lower-than-expected levels of challenge reporting. There may be a low level of awareness, broadly speaking, of challenges overall. There may be varying conceptions of what constitutes a challenge that is worthy of reporting. Lastly, inconsistent terminology and localized reporting structures may impede gathering an understanding at a broader level. Another possible complication related here is the tensions some library staff have in relation to their commitment to both social responsibility and intellectual freedom.

Conflicting priorities

It is possible that some resistance to challenge collection efforts may stem from a philosophical difference of opinion between library organizations and library workers on the value of intellectual freedom. There is a perception among some in the field that the "tension between…conceptions of intellectual freedom and the social responsibility of librarianship is a serious and divisive issue" (Shockey 2016, 103). This statement is supported by Moody's (2004, 177) survey of librarians in Queensland, Australia in which over a quarter of respondents felt their "personal beliefs to be at odds with their professional role with regard to the handling of controversial materials." Similarly, in a survey among Ohio librarians, Oltmann (2016, 40) found 46% of respondents felt that their personal beliefs had at times conflicted with the ALA's stance on intellectual freedom. In a Canadian context, Curry (1997) found 50% of interviewed library managers had taken a professional action concerning intellectual freedom that conflicted with their personal moral beliefs. Furthermore, Canadian library managers tend to believe in "adaptability" and "flexibility" when dealing with challenged materials as opposed to following a strict intellectual freedom policy of allowing all materials regardless of content (Curry 1997, 239). More recently, in an examination of the relationships between national discourses of librarianship and professional policy statements, Oltmann, Samek, and Cooke (2022) posited that the CFLA stance on intellectual freedom may not be aligned with the views of many working in the field. In an official report on the results of the 2019 IFCS, Thomas (2020) acknowledged that the "adherence to allowing controversial and diverse thought has increasingly collided with the values of inclusion and diversity for which libraries strive", and that librarians must "find the appropriate balance between allowing platforms for controversial ideas…and allowing the harm that could result from them." Thomas's sentiment mirrors Curry's (1997, 66) statement that Canadian librarians believe they "need to balance respect for the values of society with an obligation to go slightly beyond the boundaries of general acceptability." The historical analog between Curry and Thomas is particularly stark when considering the context of both statements. At the time of Curry's writing, the increasing visibility of homosexuality in society and library collections led to an influx in challenges to gay-positive literature (Curry 1997, 67), whereas the "controversial ideas" Thomas describes in 2020 are more likely to stand in opposition to LGBTQIA+ issues (Thomas 2020; Canadian Federation of Library Associations 2015-2022; Nyby 2023).

Research in Canada

The bulk of research on materials challenges within the Canadian context consists of quantitative analysis of challenges themselves, and much of it is dated at this point. Jenkinson (1986) found that school libraries report twice as many challenges as public libraries. Schrader (1992) found that at least 30% of libraries examined had no formal challenge policy, and his later work (1995) found that around 35% of libraries experienced challenges. Other research in the

1990's includes Easun's (1996) study which found that Canadian library staff were more likely to remove or restrict challenged items if they were classified as nonfiction.

Little research on challenges or library censorship in Canadian libraries has been conducted since the 1990s. Saltman (2016) examined challenges to Canadian picture books and identified a number of broad classifications for challenge motivations, including the presence of nudity or sexuality (especially homosexuality), anti-authoritarian values, and non-traditional families from the conservative perspective, and perceived racism, ageism, and sexism from the liberal or progressive perspective. Nyby (2023), in an analysis of challenges lodged with the CFLA between 2015 and 2021, found large discrepancies in rates of challenges to materials concerning LGBTQIA+ issues, depending on the size, age, education level, and voting tendencies of a library's community.

Materials and methods

The 18-question participation survey was created using Qualtrics with questions related to five areas of concern: library policy concerning challenges and intellectual freedom, awareness of the IFCS and its scope, library and library worker attitudes regarding challenges and intellectual freedom, 2022 challenge metrics, and community demographics. The participation survey was available in both national languages, French and English. The survey instrument in its entirety is presented in the appendix.

The participation survey was distributed to 479 library and library worker email addresses, representing all ten provinces and all three territories. After the initial distribution, the participation survey was subsequently distributed to 246 email addresses associated with members of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL). Ultimately, the participation survey was distributed to 615 email addresses associated with 559 individual libraries or library systems. Five email addresses were not valid and replacement addresses could not be found, leaving 610 total recipients. The participation survey was available for four weeks.

Of the 128 total responses, twenty-two were identified as duplicates and deleted. Seven responses were left entirely blank beyond the letter of information and consent and were also deleted. Ultimately, ninety-nine responses were used for analysis, eighty-eight in English and twelve in French, for a response rate of 16.2%. The responses were exported from Qualtrics and entered into a relational database using Microsoft Access for further analysis. Open-ended questions were inductively coded, analyzed for trends, and controlled vocabularies were created in order to classify each response.

The study did not receive any funding from internal or external sources. The authors report there are no competing interests to declare. Owing to the use of human participants, the study was subject to review by the Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board. The study was assigned ID number 122041 and received approval on 11 January, 2023

Results

Demographics

Responses were received from public libraries across the country, with the plurality coming from Ontario. Seventy-seven respondents indicated their provincial or territorial location: thirty-four from Ontario, fourteen from British Columbia, nine from Alberta, eight from Québec, five from Manitoba, two each from Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon Territory, and one from New Brunswick.

Seventy-seven respondents also indicated the size of community their library served. Forty-two came from municipalities of fewer than 50,000 people, twenty-three from municipalities ranging from 50,000 to 250,000 people, four from municipalities ranging between 250,000 and 500,000 people, and eight from municipalities with populations greater than 500,000.

Measuring challenges

Eighty-five respondents answered the question concerning challenges over the previous calendar year with forty-one indicating that their library had experienced challenges within that time frame. Twenty-six experienced between one and three challenges, eight experienced between three and five challenges, three experienced between five and ten challenges, and four had experienced more than ten challenges. Four were unsure, while the remaining forty respondents had experienced none. Broadly, responses to this line of questioning indicate that responding libraries experienced between ninety-five and (at least) 192 challenges in the 2022 calendar year. In comparison, the highest number of challenges reported via the IFCS in a single year is 91, reported in 2022 (CFLA 2015-2022). For context, there are 652 public library systems in Canada, compared to the sample of ninety-nine libraries who participated in this study (Cavanagh 2019). If this rate of occurrence is extrapolated out to the entire complement of Canadian libraries, it would indicate that between 625 and (at least) 1,317 individual challenges were experienced in 2022. However, due to the small sample size of this study, no actual conclusion can be made regarding the total number of unreported challenges.

Of the eighty-five respondents who answered questions around any changes to the numbers of challenges, thirty-seven indicated the number of challenges experienced in 2022 was about the same as in previous years. Twenty-one respondents reported more challenges in 2022 than in previous years, while thirteen indicated fewer challenges, and fourteen were not sure. The larger portion of respondents experiencing an increase in challenges compared to the small portion who experienced a decrease in challenges seems to

Library Policy

Eighty-three respondents reported that their library or library system has a formal policy for handling challenges while only twelve reported that they did not have a formal policy.

Three were not sure. In questions probing deeper into this policy, it was found that forty-eight respondents provided or described an official reconsideration or challenge form and eleven respondents did not have a form. Three respondents provided a link to an official challenge form yet their libraries had no written policy regarding challenges. Fifty-eight respondents indicated that their library retains documentation of past challenges that could prove fruitful data for future research.

Twenty-five respondents provided the library's official challenge policy or a link to the policy document containing the library's challenge policy. The challenge policies themselves ranged from thirty-two to 531 words with a median word count of 123. Some policies only described the challenge form while others outlined the challenge or reconsideration process in varying levels of detail. Six respondents included policy regarding informal challenges, and only one respondent included challenge reporting as a policy element. While the comprehensiveness of challenge policy is not necessarily an indicator of how much priority a library system places on handling challenges, the overall lack of policy pertaining directly to challenge reporting is worth noting, and may be a factor in low IFCS participation rates.

Terminology

Although the term "challenge" is most frequently used in LIS literature, only six respondents (9.5% of English-language responses to the question) indicated that this was the term they used. The most common term by far was "request for reconsideration", cited by forty-six respondents (74.6% of English-language responses). Other English terms included "review request" ($n = 4$, 6.3%), "book complaint" ($n = 2$, 3.1%), "reconsideration of library materials" ($n = 2$, 3.1%), "request for withdrawal" ($n = 1$, 1.6%), and "material issues" ($n = 1$, 1.6%). Among French-language responses, "demande de retrait" was the most common term, cited by three respondents (42.8% of French-language responses). Other terms included "demande de réexamen" ($n = 1$, 14.3%), "matériel controversé" ($n = 1$, 14.3%), "commentaires concernant le choix des documents"($n = 1$, 14.3%), A single respondent (14.3%) provided the answer "Nous n'en avons pas" ("we do not have one"), insinuating conversations regarding challenges rarely, if ever, come up.

CFLA and the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey

Overall there seemed to be support for the CFLA Intellectual Freedom Statement and the IFCS. Sixty respondents indicated that their library had adopted the CFLA Statement on Intellectual Freedom. Only seventeen respondents indicated that their library had experienced challenges in the last year that were not reported via the IFCS. These respondents were then asked why they did not participate in the IFCS. Most respondents cited unawareness of the IFCS ($n = 7$) or its scope ($n = 4$) as obstacles to participation. Those who were unaware of the scope of the IFCS did not believe the challenges they experienced qualified for reporting. Of the four remaining responses, two cited recent organizational changes that will allow for future

participation, one cited time constraints, and one cited technical difficulties accessing the IFCS. The remaining two respondents who were asked this question did not provide an answer.

When asked if there were considerations that would make their library more likely to report challenged materials to the IFCS, eighteen respondents cited awareness issues, thirteen of whom asked for better communication of the existence of the IFCS, four of whom asked for better communication of its access points, and one who was unaware of the scope of the IFCS. Reminders were a common theme among these responses. Several respondents asked for periodic emails that included links to the IFCS itself, to which one respondent added "Don't make me work for it." Similar to the misunderstanding of what constitutes a challenge noted in Oltmann and Reynolds (2020), one respondent noted that they have had "multiple conversations with patrons and staff about materials, but rarely do people fill out the form." Four respondents noted they would participate if they had experienced any challenges. Two noted that internal policy changes would need to be made to allow for more participation in the IFCS. Of these two, one noted the directive to participate would have to come from a superior, and the other cited a desire to improve internal tracking of challenges. Two more asked for increased visibility of IFCS data, two noted they don't have enough time to reliably participate, and one cited technical issues in accessing the IFCS.

When asked if a certain staff member was responsible for reporting challenges, the CEO or library director was the most common answer, cited by twenty-two respondents. Nineteen respondents indicated that the individual in charge of collections or an individual in the collections department assumed responsibility for reporting challenges. The title "services manager" was cited as the responsible party by five respondents. Assistant head and general librarian were cited by two respondents each. Library administrator, executive assistant, technology manager, and "any staff" were each cited by a single respondent.

Awareness

Results indicate that a lack of awareness of the IFCS and its scope are likely a major factor in low participation rates. A large percentage of respondents were either unaware of the IFCS itself or unaware of what types of challenges qualify for reporting. Just under half of the respondents (42.3% n = 36) were not aware of the existence of the IFCS, over two thirds of respondents (67.9%, n = 53) were not aware that both formal and informal challenges could be reported, and a similar proportion (64.9%, n = 50) were not aware that the IFCS encompasses non-material challenges such as challenges to policies or events. Even after eliminating respondents who were not aware of the IFCS at all, over half of remaining respondents (51.1%, n = 23) did not realize informal challenges could be reported, and just under half (46.7%, n = 21) did not know that non-material challenges could be reported. Of those familiar with the IFCS, most respondents first learned of it from one of several email listservs, including provincial library organization mailing lists, CFLA communications, or the Canadian Urban Library Council mailing list. When asked how information about the IFCS is communicated to responsible parties within a library or library system, a plurality of respondents (40.9%, n = 18)

cited internal emails among staff as their primary method of communication. However, the second largest share (31.1%, n = 14) claimed no communication method at all. Several of these respondents shared that since there was only one staff member who reported challenges, no further communication was necessary.

Attitude

Respondents were able to share information regarding their attitudes towards the IFCS when asked why their library or library system chose not to participate. However, no respondent who answered this question expressed any sentiments that implied opposition or resistance to the IFCS or concepts of intellectual freedom. In fact, eleven out of the fifteen respondents who answered this question simply noted their lack of awareness of the IFCS. Other responses indicated time constraints and a lack of organizational structure as contributing factors to non-participation. A more telling indicator of a low priority on or apathy toward intellectual freedom issues may lie in library policy regarding challenges themselves. Though most libraries have explicit policies for handling challenges, 12.2% (n = 12) of responding libraries do not. Furthermore, of the libraries that do have challenge policies, 16.7% (n = 11) did not have a patron challenge form. Rather, these libraries require the prospective challenger to put their concerns in writing via an email or letter to the library director. Several libraries that do utilize challenge forms note that the form may only be retrieved in person at the library, and one library noted that only a "senior staff member" may provide a patron with a form. Though it may not be intentional, policy peculiarities such as these may produce a chilling effect on patron challenges.

Limitations

It is reasonable to assume a certain degree of selection bias has had an effect on the profile of the participation survey's responses. It is fair to assume that participants who responded to the participation survey may already place a higher priority on intellectual freedom issues and may be more interested in the work of the CFLA Intellectual Freedom Committee, IFCS, and its results. Although no participants conveyed any sense of ambivalence, apathy, or hostility towards intellectual freedom issues or the CFLA Intellectual Freedom Committee in their responses, it is possible that library workers who do hold these feelings simply did not wish to participate in the study. It is fair to assume that participants who responded to the participation survey already place a higher priority on intellectual freedom issues and are more likely to be interested in the IFCS and its results. As such, it cannot be assumed that the responses collected in this study constitute a representative sample of Canadian libraries. Demographic response rates may have an influence on the results as well. The plurality of responses came from libraries small communities (defined as cities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants), which are likely to experience a different set of issues from their counterparts in larger cities. Additionally, the disproportionately low response rate from Québec likely obscures the distinct needs of the second-most-populous province's libraries. At most, the results of this study can be interpreted as a snapshot of the views and practices of a small sample of Canadian libraries–information that

can be valuable in informing better data collection practices regarding intellectual freedom challenges but does not necessarily represent the views and practices of Canadian libraries as a whole.

Discussion

  While it is clear that awareness of the IFCS and its scope is the most prominent obstacle to greater participation, inconsistencies in library policy and practice likely play a role as well. There is no doubt that the existence, scope, and location of the IFCS must be better communicated to Canadian libraries, but responses suggest that revisions to the various methods employed by libraries in handling challenges may better provide library staff the opportunity to report challenges. Individual libraries shape their policies to suit their widely varying needs, but there is precedent for national library organizations to provide guidelines and templates for library policymakers. The ALA website, for instance, features a toolkit for drafting selection and reconsideration policies for US libraries. The toolkit includes guiding principles in policy creation, sample procedures, sample policy statements, and even a sample reconsideration form (American Library Association 2018). Additionally, the ALA site includes a "Report Censorship" Toolkit section with information on the importance of challenge reporting, how the data is used to support intellectual freedom in libraries, and sample social media posts libraries can use to help publicize the organization's challenge reporting form (American Library Association 2023a). The CFLA, on the other hand, does not provide sample policy statements and templates. Rather, guidance on intellectual freedom policy creation can be found in links to policy statements and procedures used by specific libraries (CFLA 2022c). An improved framework for drafting challenge policies, including sample procedures that include reporting as an essential step, may promote both participation in the IFCS and awareness of intellectual freedom issues in general among Canadian libraries.

  Several respondents expressed their interest in participating in the IFCS, but have difficulty finding the time to do so. In the words of one respondent, handling a challenge "tends to be all-encompassing when you consider I still have the rest of my job to do." Another respondent lamented on the difficulty of "remembering to complete [the IFCS] after doing all the work of the challenge itself." These responses communicate the need for better staff training regarding challenge policy, potentially taking the responsibility out of the hands of the busiest workers in the library and handing it to other available staff. This too, may aid in increasing reports on informal complaints, as it is often front-end workers rather than library directors and collections managers who are confronted with such situations (Lynch 2011). A potential aid may lie in procedure templates for handling informal challenges which suggest empowering front-line staff to immediately report these types of interactions.

  Low reporting-rates especially of informal challenges may be influenced by differing conceptions of what constitutes a challenge. In open-ended responses, several respondents expressed their belief that many interactions either were not eligible for reporting via the IFCS or

did not qualify as intellectual freedom challenges. In the words of one respondent: "Not all grumblings fall under the category 'official challenges'." Other respondents noted that since the challenges did not progress to the board level or because the challenged item was not removed, they were not significant enough for reporting. These responses belie the need for better outreach to libraries communicating the criteria of an intellectual freedom challenge as defined by the IFCS. Consistency on this issue may be doubly important as censorship efforts expand from conventional requests to reconsideration to social media movements, protests, and pressures on municipal councils (Pekoll 2020).

Responses to the open-ended questions also provide insight on methods to improve general awareness of the IFCS. When asked what considerations may make a library more likely to participate in the IFCS, a plurality of respondents asked for better communication. These responses often included language along the lines of "periodic reminders" and "more frequent reminders". One respondent asked that information regarding the IFCS be sent to their provincial library organization for distribution among its members. Incidentally, periodic reminders sent to provincial library organizations is exactly the communication strategy the CFLA Intellectual Freedom Committee currently employs. It is possible that not all messages are successfully passed from the provincial bodies to their member libraries, and if the provincial bodies are successful at forwarding the messages to their members, the messages may go into a general inbox, or to the inbox of a library worker not responsible for challenge reporting. A more effective practice may involve the curation of a contact list of library directors, branch managers, and collections managers with which the committee may communicate directly.

Access to the IFCS was a repeated theme in open-ended responses. When discussing considerations for promoting participation, multiple respondents specifically asked for a link to the IFCS or used language asking after its location. Two of the five respondents who voiced this concern were already aware of the existence of the IFCS, yet still had difficulty locating it. This belies a need to create a clearer access point for library workers. Recently, an access point to the IFCS was added to the front page of the CFLA website, which may facilitate reporting in the future. However, this is only helpful if library workers accessing the site are already familiar with the name and purpose of the IFCS. For the sake of clarity, it may be advisable to take another cue from the ALA, whose online access point simply consists of a button labeled "Report Censorship" (ALA 2023a)

Conclusion

The study has identified several factors contributing to low rates of challenge reporting among Canadian libraries. General awareness of the IFCS appears to be the most prominent obstacle while time constraints, positional responsibilities, and other policy and practice factors form secondary impediments. Though better distribution and communication of the IFCS is certainly needed, work must be done to better communicate with Canadian libraries on the importance of intellectual freedom issues in general and their interplay with library practice and policy. As modes of library censorship efforts have evolved, so must our modes of tracking and

documenting them. In addition to the recommendations provided in this paper, there is a necessity for broader outreach on the issue to not only Canadian library workers but the general public as well. The continued expansion and development of organized movements intent on removing books from libraries may have a direct effect on the lives of many Canadian families as the existence and well-being of their local public or school libraries is threatened. However, the gravity of the issue cannot be adequately communicated without the presence of reliable supporting data. It is incumbent upon both the CFLA and individual libraries to improve their efforts on this matter. Communication efforts must improve on the part of the CFLA, but libraries must be open to recognizing the importance of the issue and revisiting policy framework in order to allow better reporting practices.

There is no doubt that rates of intellectual freedom challenges are on the rise, but without a keen awareness of the nature of these challenges and how they manifest, libraries may struggle in their efforts to uphold intellectual freedom.

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Appendix

Questions as they appeared on the survey, their formats, and areas of concern. The letter of information and consent appeared as Q1.

Question	Format	Primary Concern	Secondary Concern
Does your library or library system have a formal materials challenge or reconsideration process either as a separate policy or as part of a collections policy?	Multiple choice	policy	attitude
Please briefly describe the format of the challenge or reconsideration process, or provide a link to it.	Open-ended	policy	attitude
Does your library or library system retain documentation of past challenges?	Multiple choice	policy	
To the best of your ability, please estimate how many materials challenges or reconsideration requests your library or library system has received in the 2022 calendar year.	Multiple choice	metrics	
To the best of your knowledge, how does the number of challenges your library system received in the 2022 calendar year compare to previous years?	Multiple choice	metrics	
Are you familiar with the CFLA-FCAB Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey?	Multiple choice	awareness	
How did you first learn about the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey?	Open-ended	awareness	
To the best of your knowledge, did your library or library system experience any challenges in the 2022 calendar year *without* reporting them via the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey?	Multiple choice	metrics	attitude
Please briefly describe why your library or library system does not participate in the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey.	Open-ended	attitude	policy
Are there any considerations that would make your library or library system more likely to participate in the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey?	Open-ended	policy	attitude

If your library or library system does participate in the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey, please indicate the position titles of staff members responsible for reporting challenges.	Open-ended	policy	
Please briefly describe how awareness of the Intellectual Challenges Survey is communicated to responsible individuals.	Open-ended	awareness	policy
Are you aware that any form of challenge—be it formal or informal, a verbal complaint or a written message, or even a comment on a social media platform—may be reported via the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey?	Multiple choice	awareness	
Are you aware that challenges or resistance to non-material items, such as events or library policy, may be reported via the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey?	Multiple choice	awareness	
The terminology used to refer to materials challenges varies between library systems. While some libraries use the term "challenge", others use terms such as "request for reconsideration" or "review request". Please provide the specific terminology your library or library system uses to describe materials challenges.	Open-ended	policy	
Has your library or library system adopted the CFLA-FCAB Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries?	Multiple choice	policy	attitude
Please indicate the province or territory in which your library or library system is located.	Multiple choice	demographics	
What is the population range of the city, municipality, or county that your library or library system serves?	Multiple choice	demographics	

Tables

Table 1: Total number of challenges reported via the IFCS, 2006-2022

Year	Total reported challenges
2006	30
2007	43
2008	76
2009	61
2010	72
2011	75
2012	64
2013	77
2014	77
2015	34
2016	59
2017	67
2018	41
2019	46
2020	21
2021	73
2022	91