


Library Ethics
Kansas Regional Library Systems



Thursday, September 9, 2021 – 1:30 – 2:30 pm CDT
with Pat Wagner – pat@patternresearch.com

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Kansas Regional Library Systems

Kansas regional library systems were established under Kansas Law (K.S.A. 75-2547, K.S.A. 75-2548) in 1965 as agents of support for local public libraries.

The primary goals were, and remain, the improvement of existing library services and programs and the extension of library service to areas where it was previously unavailable.

Central Kansas Library System (CKLS) - <https://ckls.org>
North Central Library System (NCKLS) - <https://lib.nckls.org>
Northeast Library System (NEKLS) - <https://www.nekls.org>
Northwest Library System (NWKLS) - <https://nwkls.org>
South Central Library System (SCKLS) - <https://www.sckls.info>
Southeast Library System (SEKLS) - <https://www.sekls.org>
Southwest Library System (SWKLS) - <https://swkls.org>

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After-lunch Course

After-lunch Course is a free, four-part, continuing education series, hosted by the *Kansas Regional Library Systems* for Kansas libraries.

Please save the dates for the next live webinar:
Thurs, December 9: *HR Management* with Jamie LaRue
Recordings will be available for all four presentations.
See systems.mykansalibrary.org for updates on how you can connect with these online workshops.

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Note on Library Titles and Roles

Different libraries use different titles for work roles.
Pick the ones that best suit you.

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Caveat

We are not lawyers: and neither are you.

The *“ultimate”* authorities regarding codes of ethics and policy decisions are **your governing board members and the lawyers who would defend your library in court.**

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Key Idea

Ethical behavior requires *thoughtful* and *respectful* decisions and actions in **complex** situations.

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Key Idea

Ethics are both **What** you do and **How** you do it.
Appearances count as **much or more** than intentions.

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Outcomes

- **Review your library policies based on these four ethical principles.**
- **Discuss with stakeholders the process of ethical decision-making—before a crisis.**
- **Incorporate ethical standards in the strategic plan, contracts, job descriptions.**

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Agenda

- **The Origins of Library Ethics**
- **The Four Principles**
 - **Transparency - Privacy**
 - **Access to information - Fairness**
- **Ethical Codes**
- **Resources**

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What are Ethics?

What do you think *ethics* means?

**Compare your answers
to the list compiled
on the next slide.**

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What are Ethics?

***Study* of morality: right and wrong**

- More than how you *feel*
- Requires research and evidence
- Requires transparent process
- Decisions and actions
- How we treat everyone, everyday

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What Shaped Our Ethics?

- **How our brains works: Friend or enemy?**
- **Religious and spiritual traditions**
- **Rule of Law: 2000 years (Plato)**
- **Magna Carta: 1215 A.D.**
 - *Safety for the stranger: equal treatment*
- **English common law**
- **The United States *Bill of Rights***

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The Bill of Rights

First Amendment: Individuals have **legal right to express ideas** without government interference and **to read and listen to the ideas of others.**

The Supreme Court has decided that protections stated in 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 9th Amendments imply **Constitutional right to privacy.**

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Rule of Law

- **Ordinary and accessible:**
 - **easy to understand**
 - **transparent process**
- **Applies to everyone equally:**
 - **no special privileges**
 - **no special class or group**

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Everyday Ethics

- **Not expecting entitlements or status**
- **Treats everyone as a social peer**
- **Respects and follows due process**
- **Gives everyone chance to participate**
- **Tells the truth about everything**
- *Does not profit from decisions*

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Why Are Ethics Important?

- **Build credibility:**
Earn trust and respect
- **Set standards for decisions:**
Increase productivity
- **Reduce unhealthy conflict:**
Establish respected rules

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The Four Standards

- ***Transparency* in governance**
- ***Privacy* for information users**
- ***Access to information* for all**
- ***Equal treatment* for everyone**

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Transparency

- **Are open meeting laws followed, both the letter and spirit of the law?**
- **Are decisions made transparently?**
- **Discussions and decisions are open?**
 - **Few exceptions: personnel, finances**
 - **Keep on topic in executive sessions**
 - **Ask for input from everyone.**

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Practical Transparency

- **Are signs self-explanatory?**
- **Are rules written and posted?**
- **Is library jargon avoided?**
- **How are newcomers treated?**
- **Are staff *gatekeepers*: secret services?**
- **Are difficult people lied to?**
- **Are secrets kept from personnel?**

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Privacy

- **Based, in part, on *Bill of Rights***
- **Supports law enforcement**
- **Requires legal review and training**
- **Protection of circ/usage records:**
 - **Respond only to court orders.**
 - **Question subpoenas.**
- **Physical privacy in library**

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Practical Privacy

- **Not broadcasting sensitive information**
- **Procedures for dealing with media**
- **No comments on customer materials**
- **Private protocol for "holds" shelves**
- **State laws regarding privacy posted**
- **Public terminals: private or public?**
- **Applies to library customers and staff**

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Access to Information for All

- **Staff and trustee diversity**
- **Services for all residents:**
 - **Illiterate, non-English-speaking**
 - **Multi-lingual materials and signs**
 - **Information in many formats**
 - **Big print, web accessibility, audiobooks**
 - **Hours for working class people**
- **Online services for 21st century**

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Practical Access

- **Lighting in stacks, study areas, etc.**
- **Safety on stairs, bathrooms, outdoors**
- **ADA followed in word and deed**
- **“Fine-free” increases circulation.**
- **Keeping “Paper” alternatives to digital**
- **Can customers sit at service desks?**
- **Online services for 21st century**
- **Cataloging: help or hindrance?**

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Equal Treatment

- **Based, in part, on Rule of Law**
- **No elitism, cronyism, nepotism**
- **No special board privileges**
- **No secret library policies**
- **No inner circle of business**
- **No “heir apparent” for recruitment**
- **The “bathroom” rule**

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Practical Equality

- *Everyone receives respectful behavior, meaning manners and goodwill.*
- **Look on your face and tone of your voice**
- **Your posture and gestures**
- *The amount of time you spend and speed of the interactions and transactions*
- **Your willingness to follow-through**

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Equity/Inclusion/Diversity

**Exceptions, meaning special treatment,
are decided by the library as a whole,
via principles, policies, and procedures,
with input from stakeholders:
**not just your individual or one
group's opinion.****

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Where Ethics Live

**Codes of ethics often are implied
in a library's strategic plan
–in its mission, vision, principles, and values–
as well as in policies, employee handbooks,
union and other employment contracts,
and library board bylaws.**

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Exercise

What would make working within a **written code of ethics, which governs everyday behavior, challenging?**

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Subjective Codes

- *Favoring family and friends is a good thing.*
- **Make exceptions for worthy people.**
- *Respect is reserved for those who earn it.*
- **Gossip is protected speech.**
- *Staff and board deserve special rewards.*
- **People shouldn't "waste time" in library.**
- *People shouldn't speak above a whisper.*

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Ethical Breaches

No one will know. It's just one time.
We don't have time to check the facts.
Decide right now. We can't look indecisive.
If we tell people, they're going to be upset.
Don't let "them" speak; will open can of worms.
If they cared, they would have said something.
The decision won't hurt me or anyone I know.
Hold the meeting where the public can't find us.

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Exercise

**How would you describe
the ethical behavior
–what it sounds like and looks like–
of library leaders, managers, staff,
and volunteers?**

What would be one concrete example?

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Practical Standards

- **Civility clause in job description**
- **Clearly written expectations**
- **Ethics included in evaluations**
- **Staff meetings regarding ethics**
- **Involvement in state association**
- **Professional development collection**

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Practical Standards

- **Training on current library ethics**
- **No special privileges for insiders**
- **Strict guidelines regarding nepotism**
- **Strict guidelines regarding cronyism**
- **Yearly review of state library law**
- **Legal review with library attorney**

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Resources

- **American Library Association Ethics Resources**
ala.org/tools/ethics
- **American Association of Law Libraries Ethical Principles**
aallnet.org/about-us/what-we-do/policies/public-policies/aall-ethical-principles/
- **International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' Professional Code of Ethics for Librarians**
ifla.org/faife/professional-codes-of-ethics-for-librarians
- **Medical Library Association Code of Ethics for Health Sciences Librarianship**
mlanet.org/page/code-of-ethics
- **SLA Professional Ethics Guidelines**
sla.org/professional-ethics-guidelines-for-sla-members/

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