

SSC Guidelines

These guidelines are standards of excellence for school, synagogue, and Jewish community center libraries. Please use the following criteria to improve the operation of your library:

Library Committee

The library should have the support and guidance of a library committee. This committee serves as the liaison to the Board of the parent institution and provides advice, support, and guidance to the professional staff of the library. A member of the committee should represent the library on the Board of the parent institution. School libraries should have a committee of faculty members who provide input into the acquisition of materials and help foster librarian-teacher collaboration.

Mission Statement and Purpose

A written statement of purpose should be formulated, outlining the goals and activities, the vision and values of the library. This ensures that everyone – staff, patrons, sponsors – all know exactly what the intentions and aspirations of the library are.

Policies and Record-Keeping

Collection development, library services, library programming, administrative and personnel structure, and decision-making procedures are all activities that should be clearly defined. Policies for circulation, handling complaints, dealing with censorship, handling of gift books and other donations should all be included. A procedure manual listing the exact steps for each of these activities is highly advisable. It is worthwhile to include job descriptions for the professional, clerical, and volunteer staff that state which procedures are whose responsibilities. Record keeping is an important task. Statistics are useful when the Board is reviewing the budget of the library. Maintaining records of circulation, number of patrons served, attendance at programs, or lessons taught can prove valuable.

Staff and Hours of Operation

Adequate staffing is required to maintain the collection, plan programs, provide guidance in book selection for patrons, and locate information. Every library should (ideally) be run by a paid professional librarian, with a background in Jewish studies being especially useful. The librarian should keep informed by attending workshops at the annual national AJL convention and local AJL meetings.

Additional support staff, paid or volunteer, to assist with the activities of running the library is often necessary. This workforce should be well-trained and capable of performing in the absence of the librarian.

It is essential that the library have regularly scheduled hours, with staff available for assistance, publicized in the local Jewish newspaper, synagogue bulletin or the website and posted in a clearly visible place.

Budget

The source of funds and the procedures for requesting, planning, and approving the budget vary from institution to institution. For an established library to maintain its collection, facility, and staffing, it is essential to have a continuous, reliable, steady source of income. The funds may come from the general budget of the parent institution, from an endowment, or from steady contributions to the library. The library must have an annual amount budgeted to pay the salary of a qualified librarian and a separate acquisitions budget.

Circulating and Reference Collections

The collection is the heart and soul of the library and should be developed and maintained through a carefully considered written selection policy that covers gifts and other donations. This, along with regularly scheduled evaluations and inventories, serves to document the current collection, pursue lost books, fill gaps in the collection, discard out-of-date books, and establish a framework for future acquisitions.

The Judaic library is a collection of special materials, which is why it is important to have a written collection development policy. It is frequently tempting to purchase items that are desired by patrons but are not appropriate for a Judaic library. This must be kept in mind as purchasing decisions are made.

The Judaic collection should reflect the special interests and requirements of the institution and/or community it serves. For example, a Judaic library in South Florida may give emphasis to the Cuban Jewish experience. A comprehensive library should have at least 10 circulating volumes per patron.

The Catalog

The collection is only useful if it is accessible to all patrons – children, adults, educators, clergy, students, and researchers. Every established library therefore must have a comprehensive catalog that affords ready access to a listing of all the library materials. The catalog must employ a standard classification numbering system, i.e., Dewey, Library of Congress or the specialized systems developed for small Judaic collections, namely Elazar or Weine.

Automation System

The current standard for cataloging and circulating items is through the use of an online or computer-based library automation system. There are many systems to choose from, some of which are relatively inexpensive. An automation system will enhance the ease and reliability of recording items in the collection as well as circulating materials to patrons.

Programming

Library programming should raise institutional or community awareness of the library, create positive PR for the library and provide cultural experiences for patrons.

The dynamic library has activities scheduled involving the patron community during Jewish Book Month and throughout the year. The activities may be author visits or other speakers, contests for children or adults, special displays, book talks, etc.

There should be a regular method of communicating with the community about these and other events in the library. Effective communication methods include websites, flyers, e-mail, a library newsletter, or the bulletin of the parent institution.

The Physical Plant

The library should be located in a part of the building where it is accessible to its patrons. It should be well-designed and well-lit with attractive, sturdy furniture and standard size library shelves. The library should be used mainly for library activities, with limitations on other uses (meetings, storage, etc.)

Ideally, the area for children should be separated from the adult room so that adults may still use the library while children have activities or classes. Space must be provided for processing new books, clerical work, and storing supplies. Preferably this should be a separate, adjacent workroom.

Inter-Library and Intra-Organizational Relations

The library should be a member of the Association of Jewish Libraries and a local chapter of AJL, if there is one in the vicinity. These offer invaluable resources for library education, publications, advice and mentoring.

In addition, library staff should communicate regularly about library services, events, statistics, problems and successes with other branches within and outside the parent institution (teachers, administrators, committees, boards, etc.)

The librarian should be proactive in fostering patron interest and increasing usage of the library to the greatest extent possible.