



Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti-Harassment Policy

This policy is a system-wide policy for application to all libraries within the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System.

This policy is also part of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual.

I. Statement of Policy

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library ("Library") is committed to maintaining an environment free of discrimination and unlawful harassment.

A. Equal Employment Opportunity

It is the policy of the Library to provide Equal Employment Opportunity in every aspect of employment to all applicants and employees without regard to gender, race, color, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, ancestry, religion, creed, age, disability, familial status, marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, military status, genetic predisposition, arrest or conviction status, domestic violence victim status, known relationship or association with member of a protected class, or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law.

B. Unlawful Harassment

The Library will not tolerate unlawful harassment of its employees by any supervisor, coworker, volunteer, patron, or any other person with whom employees may come into contact during work. Similarly, the Library will not tolerate its employees engaging in unlawful harassment of co-workers or of non-employees with whom they come into contact during work, including but not limited to job applicants, vendors, contractors, patrons, and volunteers.

1. The Library prohibits all forms of unlawful harassment. Generally, unlawful harassment includes any unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, written, physical, or visual, that is based upon a person's protected characteristic, such as gender, race, color, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, ancestry, religion, creed, age, disability, familial status, marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, military status, genetic predisposition, arrest or conviction status, domestic violence victim status, or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law.
2. Unlawful harassment is not limited to the physical workplace itself. It can occur while employees are traveling for business or at employer-sponsored events. Harassment can occur when employees are working remotely as well. Calls, texts, emails and social media usage by employees can constitute unlawful workplace harassment, even if they occur away from the workplace premises, on personal devices or during non-work hours.

C. Examples of Harassment

1. Offensive comments such as racial or ethnic slurs, jokes, epithets, and innuendo;
2. Verbal or physical kidding, teasing or practical jokes based on a person's protected characteristic;
3. Harassing conduct based on a protected characteristic that unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment; or
4. Any action taken because of an individual's protected characteristic that alters the terms, conditions and/or privileges of employment.

D. Sexual Harassment – See *Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy*.

E. Applicability of Policy

1. The prohibition against discrimination and unlawful harassment applies to everyone: managers, supervisors, salaried and hourly employees, temporary employees, volunteers, contractors, trustees, public officials, appointed administrative officers, patrons, or any other non-employee.
2. The Library will not allow unlawful harassment of any kind by anyone. This policy will be reviewed with all staff. It is the responsibility of each supervisor to ensure affirmative implementation of this policy to avoid discrimination, unlawful harassment or retaliation in employment, and to report all violations they may become aware of. All employees are expected to be cognizant of this policy and cooperate with its implementation.
3. The Library has zero tolerance for the types of conduct described in this policy. The Library may treat instances of inappropriate conduct as a

violation of this policy, regardless of the specific wording of this policy or technical definitions in the applicable laws; and the Library may deal with such conduct with disciplinary action or other forms of corrective action as deemed appropriate. Such conduct may also be treated as a violation of the applicable library's Rules of Conduct.

4. Any harassment based on a protected class violates this policy regardless of whether such harassment would be considered unlawful under relevant federal, state, or local laws. .

II. Procedure

A. Reporting Discrimination, Harassment or Other Violations of This Policy

All employees, volunteers, patrons, and other persons utilizing or working in Library facilities and services are encouraged to promptly report any conduct that they are subject to, or that they witness, which may violate this policy. If the Library does not know about the discriminatory or harassing conduct, it cannot act.

Prior to making a report, individuals who believe they have been discriminated against or harassed may choose to firmly and promptly notify the offender that their behavior is unwelcome. However, the Library recognizes that such a confrontation may be uncomfortable or even impossible. Therefore, notifying the offender is not required.

To make a report, individuals should follow the steps set forth below:

1. Notify Appropriate Staff

- a. Employees, supervisors, and managers must report any incident of discrimination, retaliation, sexual harassment, or other harassment.
- b. Employees who believe they have been subject to or witnessed conduct which violates this policy should immediately report the incident to their direct supervisor.
- c. If the direct supervisor is the alleged offender or the employee is uncomfortable reporting the incident of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation to their direct supervisor, the incident should be reported to the Department Head or contract Library Director.
- d. In the event that the circumstances of the situation make it inappropriate to report the incident to the individual's direct supervisor, Department Head, or contract Library Director, the incident should be reported to Human Resources.
- e. Supervisors and managers must immediately report any incident or report of discrimination, retaliation, sexual harassment, or unlawful harassment even if they are not the target or victim of such harassment to Human Resources.
- f. If the circumstances of the situation make it inappropriate to report the incident to Human Resources or in the event the individual is not

an employee, the incident should be reported to the System Library Director.

- g. In the event that the complaint is against a contract Library Director, the applicable Board President will be notified.

2. Promptly Report Complaint

- a. The Library encourages the prompt reporting of complaints so that a rapid response and appropriate action may be taken.
- b. Failure to promptly report a complaint can hinder an effective investigation.
- c. A prompt report not only aids the complainant but also helps to maintain an environment free from discrimination for all.
- d. Reports of harassment may be made verbally or in writing. A form for submission of a written complaint is attached to this policy, and all individuals are encouraged to use this complaint form. Individuals who are reporting harassment on behalf of another person should use the complaint form and note that it is on another person's behalf.

3. Prepare Written Report of Misconduct

- a. An accurate record of objectionable behavior or misconduct is needed to resolve a formal complaint of discrimination, retaliation, and/or harassment.
- b. Any and all verbal and written reports must be submitted to Human Resources or the System Library Director for investigation.
- c. Upon receipt of a complaint under this policy, Human Resources or the System Library Director will complete a formal written report of the complaint, if not already done by the complainant or their supervisor.
- d. Individuals who believe they have been or are currently being subjected to discrimination, retaliation, or harassment should maintain a record of objectionable conduct in order to prepare effectively for the investigation.

B. Investigating the Complaint

1. Confidentiality

Any allegation of discrimination, retaliation, or unlawful harassment will be investigated promptly. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the investigatory process to the extent practical and appropriate under the circumstances.

2. Investigation Process

- a. The Library will investigate thoroughly and quickly any incident of discrimination, retaliation, or harassment and will make every effort to take the wishes of the complainant into consideration, keeping the complainant informed as to the status of the investigation.
- b. Depending on the circumstances of the complaint, Human Resources or the System Library Director will determine if the investigation will be completed internally or if it is more appropriate to forward the complaint to a third party for investigation.

C. Corrective Action

1. Employees

The Library will impose appropriate discipline or other corrective action, depending on the nature and seriousness of the offense, up to and including termination, against any manager, supervisor, or employee found to have violated this policy, regardless of whether such conduct is considered under the law to constitute unlawful discrimination or harassment or retaliation.

2. Non-employees

When a patron, volunteer, or other person not employed by the Library is found to have engaged in unlawful harassment, discrimination, or retaliation against a Library employee, the Library will advise the person of the Library's policy against such conduct, and will take such other actions as are appropriate under the circumstances, up to and including suspension of library privileges.

III. Protection Against Retaliation

The Library will not, in any way, retaliate against an individual who makes a complaint of discrimination or harassment or against any participant in the investigation; nor will it permit any manager, supervisor, or employee to do so. Retaliation is defined as discriminating against an individual because they opposed discrimination and/or harassment; made a charge, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing related to prohibited conduct under this policy; or exercised any other legal right protected by federal, state, or local law requiring equal opportunity.

Retaliation is a serious violation of this policy and should be reported immediately by following the reporting procedure set forth above. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the offense, the Library will impose appropriate discipline, up to and including termination, against any manager, supervisor, or employee found to have retaliated against another individual for reporting discrimination and/or harassment.

A. Examples of Retaliation:

1. Treating someone who has reported an incident of discrimination and/or harassment or participated in an investigation differently from other individuals (e.g. cold shoulder).
2. Making negative comments or unreasonably disciplining, reducing responsibility, denying a transfer, giving unfavorable evaluations, or scrutinizing the work, etc. of an individual because that individual has reported an incident of discrimination and/or harassment or participated in an investigation.
3. Subjecting an individual to any adverse employment action for reporting an incident of discrimination and/or harassment or participating in an investigation.
4. Encouraging or ordering other staff to retaliate against an individual who has reported an incident of discrimination and/or harassment or participated in an investigation.
5. Engaging in other behavior that can reasonably be construed to be retaliatory.
6. Disclosing an employee's personnel files because they have opposed any practices forbidden under the New York State Human Rights Law ("NYS HRL"), filed a complaint, testified, or assisted in any proceeding under NYS HRL, except where the disclosure is made in the course of commencing or responding to a complaint in any proceeding under the NYS HRL or any other civil or criminal action or other judicial or administrative proceeding as permitted by applicable law.

IV. Legal Remedies

Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against, harassed, or retaliated against in violation of this policy should first file an internal complaint with the Library, as described above. If an individual is dissatisfied with the response, they may file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) at (716)551-4441 and/or the New York State Division of Human Rights at (716)847-7632, which are authorized to investigate the allegations in the complaint. Individuals also may contact a private attorney or union representative should they believe they have been subjected to any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation.

Adopted April 20, 2017 per Resolution 2017-11 (supersedes independently adopted EEO Policy contained in the Library Employee Handbook and Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual on December 18, 2014 and the Anti-Harassment Policy last amended March 17, 2016).

(Administration Revised July 2018 – updated phone number Section II.A.1.d).

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Reviewed by the Policy Committee December 19, 2024.

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Amendments Proposed for Review at the November 20, 2025 Meeting of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library Board of Trustees' Policy Committee.

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