

CFLA-FCAB Intellectual Freedom Committee

2023 Annual Report

Introduction

This report addresses activities undertaken in the calendar year 2023, with references to activities in previous years included for context. It describes the work of the CFLA-FCAB Intellectual Freedom Committee (Committee) on continuing projects, internal organization, and support actions. Projects in 2024 continuing developments in 2023 are noted.

Continuing projects

Discussions between the Centre for Free Expression and the Committee continued through the year, laying the groundwork for an agreement in principle reached in mid-January 2024.

Intellectual Freedom Toolkit

Work on the Intellectual Freedom Toolkit continued with the addition of links to new resources. The Toolkit is available [here](#).

Communications Working Group

In collaboration with the Challenges Survey working group, it was decided to survey Canadian public libraries about their participation in the Challenges Survey and their policies regarding Intellectual Freedom challenges. The survey design was completed in 2022 and the survey took place in 2023. The results suggest that ease of use and greater publicity will increase participation. For context, participation in the ALA survey captures only a tenth of the suspected challenges. In addition, the working group surveyed those libraries that had contributed 2022 incidents to the database on the question of anonymity. While anonymity was not necessary to the majority of those surveyed, several libraries did regard it as essential and a larger group approved of offering the option, regardless of whether found it necessary to their own libraries. Quebec libraries were considerably more inclined to view anonymity as essential than libraries outside that province.

Challenges Survey Working Group

Files for 2022 (Most challenged, Data, Report) were added to the web page in the spring of 2023. The process of creation, translation and uploading is on the verge of becoming routine. For the fourth year in a row, members of the Challenges Survey Working Group prepared a report to be published in the 2024 Freedom to Read Week. The participation of ABPQ increased the representation of Quebec libraries in the project.

The reports posted on the web were available in both official languages.

While the discussions with the Centre for Free Expression have borne fruit, there will be substantial technical work for the Working Group in 2024.

Membership

Martin Bonnard, Sharon Day, Dina Stevens, and Marc Saunders joined the Committee this year and Sarah Meilleur's term expired. Jessica Knoch was appointed liaison by the Board until she stepped away from the Board and was followed by Mélanie Raymond.

The process of filling vacancies on the Committee has become more efficient under the revised Terms of Reference. During the year the Board agreed to amend the Terms of Reference, substituting a Vice-Chair for the previous provision for a co-Chair.

With long-time chair, Richard Beaudry stepping down in December, Sarah Meilleur agreed to be interim chair and Wendy Wright was subsequently appointed to a one-year term as Chair. Michael Nyby agreed to assume the post of Vice Chair following the revision of the Terms of Reference.

Intellectual Freedom Award

The first recipient of the Intellectual Freedom Award was named: James Turk of the Centre for Free Expression. The award was presented at the OLA Super Conference in January.

Supporting the Library Community

Collaboration

The collaboration with the Centre for Free Expression has been noted. The Board reached out to the Book and Periodical Council to strengthen ties to Freedom to Read Week and that work is continuing under the revision of the Freedom to Read Week structure. As noted above, Michael Nyby has prepared an article for the 2024 Freedom to Read Week website.

Internal organization

No organization can remain vibrant without attending to its internal structures and processes. Well done, such efforts rise above "housekeeping" and inform and invigorate the organization. The revision of the Chair/Vice Chair/Co-Chair structure has been mentioned, creating, with the Secretary, an executive committee to assist the Chair and share some of the organizational tasks.

The Committee agreed to create a skills matrix in anticipation of resignations in 2024.

With the revision of the Committee's Terms of Reference, approved June 2022, the workplan that originated in 2018 was considered complete, a few unfinished projects being brought forward, e.g., the Intellectual Freedom Award. In August, the Committee began a consideration of the library environment in Canada with a view to creating a revised workplan closely tied to the revised Terms of Reference. A special meeting of the Committee was held in November and the draft document created will be reviewed in 2024. The draft document emphasizes advocacy in a time of ferment.

Individual Efforts

Members of the IFC were active during 2023 in a variety of ways. Media interviews in accordance with the Committee's policies; local, regional, and national on-line presentations, and participation in regularly scheduled conferences were all undertaken on matters regarding intellectual freedom. Briefly:

- 9 Regional presentations
- 6 Local presentations
- 4 Conference presentations
- 4 Media interviews
- 4 Published articles
- 1 National workshop
- 1 Published book

Not listed are several consultations with members of the library community in response to queries to the Chair.