

Steven Greechie

# Intellectual freedom associations

## Resources for online research

There's a wide range of specific issues in the area of freedom of expression, from book challenges and violence to press freedom and privacy. Writers are threatened, arrested and assaulted. Privacy is undermined. Governments around the world assault intellectual freedom.

Parties specifically concerned with these issues range from libraries and newspapers to games publishers and political activists. Artists and translators, novelists, and faculty encounter overt censorship and more subtle obstacles to their work.

As well, there is a wide array of responses to these matters. Organizations advocating for free speech engage in many and diverse activities. They lobby governments and educate the public. They provide funding and grant awards. They arrange conferences and circulate petitions. Certain U.S. organizations address freedom of expression within the context of First Amendment rights.

This article is intended as a resource guide to a selection of U.S. and international advocacy organizations. Its list is by no means exhaustive. It's meant to educate librarians to some of the associations that might serve as resources in their work, and to only some of the services and materials these organizations offer, noting material available on websites.

While challenges to free expression are common, U.S. and international communities respond with valuable and very often free support material and services.

### USA

- **The American Booksellers for Free Expression (The ABFE Group at ABA).** The American Booksellers for Free Expression is a group within The American Booksellers Association. It educates booksellers and other groups to the importance of press freedom and provides resources to further the mission. These resources include "Scenes from a Bookstore: Free Speech Vignettes," a video training guide on press freedom that helps booksellers respond to questions from the public. The Free Speech checklist lets bookstores assess their own free speech positions. The material also addresses customer privacy. The Kids Right to Read Project supports schools and libraries in responding to challenges. The program also furthers community awareness and local activism and tracks book censorship. The ABFE involves itself in legal cases, as well. *Access:* <http://www.bookweb.org/abfe>.

- **The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).** The American Civil Liberties Union is the country's largest public interest law firm. Its legal, legislative, and communications staff are deeply involved in intellectual freedom issues. The organization provides free representation in court cases. While there's no charge for representation in these test cases, the ACLU chooses carefully the test cases it

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accepts. It also lobbies state and federal legislatures. The ACLU works through a network of affiliates. These are autonomous affiliate offices in every state, as well as Wash-

## The Free Expression Policy Project

*a think tank on artistic and intellectual freedom*

ington D.C., and Puerto Rico. People seeking help should initially contact their local affiliate. The ACLU website is replete with information on every aspect of our individual freedoms. We can find news, legal documents, FOIA documents, biographies, cases, etc. *Access:* <http://www.aclu.org>.

- **Banned Books Week.** Banned Books Week is a set of events related to freedom of expression held every September. It's sponsored by a dozen organizations and endorsed by The Center for the Book of The Library of Congress. Its website offers resources to help design Banned Books Week events. It has material directed specifically to artists, booksellers, kids, teachers, publishers, students, and writers. Librarians are referred to ALA. *Access:* <http://www.bannedbooksweek.org>.

- **First Amendment Project (FAP).** FAP provides free legal representation on matters concerning freedom of speech. It challenges laws and policies that suppress free speech, defends accused individuals, and contests government noncompliance. The resource page on the website offers material on obtaining public information from government agencies and court systems. FAP's Free Press Initiative educates and defends journalists. The program has telephone and email hotlines offering advice and referrals. The Identity Project addresses issues around government identity-based programs that restrict the freedom to travel. The Freedom of Artistic Expression Initiative supports artists. This program also includes a telephone hotline. FAP has a particular focus on California. *Access:* <http://www.thefirstamendment.org/>.

- **Free Expression Policy Project.** The Free Expression Policy Project's initiatives concern the censorship of material directed to children and adolescents, limitations on publicly funded expression, and digital fil-

tering and rating systems. The association is also involved with media democracy matters, such as media consolidation, and with intellectual property issues.

F E P P ' s

Fact Sheets are thorough discussions of intellectual freedom issues. The subjects of the five Fact Sheets on the website are political dissent and censorship, media democracy, sex and censorship, media violence, Internet filters. There are also commentaries, and court and agency briefs on the site. *Access:* <http://www.fepproject.org/>.

- **Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF).**

FTRF focuses on supporting U.S. libraries and individual librarians. It advocates for freedom of speech and access to information, as well as for libraries' freedom to make available all material in their collections. It also offers legal counsel. FTRF awards grants including a scholarship, money to support Banned Books Week events, and financial assistance including help with legal fees. FTRF's Developing Issues Committee reports on current freedom of expression and privacy issues. A selection of these reports is available on the website. *Access:* <http://www.ftrf.org>.



- **Media Coalition.** Media Coalition furthers freedom of expression for all media: books, periodicals, movies, sound, and video. Its eight members represent most of the producers and retailers in these industries. This organization works within the legislative and court systems, advising on legislation and files amicus briefs. It challenges laws threatening free speech, including those that impose taxes or surcharges on specific content or media, and it advocates for freedom from content restrictions in communication and entertainment. Its most recent report addresses freedoms in the area of new media. *Access:* <http://mediacoalition.org/>.

• **National Campaign for Freedom of Expression (NCFE).** NCFE, associated with the First Amendment project, publishes on its website a lengthy handbook on freedom of artistic expression. It focuses on protests against art, government censorship, and breach of exhibition contracts. It advises on understanding the issues, preparing for challenges, and responding to them. *Access:* <http://www.thefirstamendment.org/ncfe1.htm>.

• **National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC).** The National Coalition Against Censorship is comprised of more than 50 not-for-profit organizations in the arts, religion, education, and other fields. It addresses several populations, including universities, scientists, youth, and visual artists. It has an initiative on sex and censorship. NCAC's Wiki of Censorship History has information on censorship incidents from ancient times to the present. The area on The Freedom of Expression network has a sizable list of its members, consisting of U.S. organizations involved with freedom of expression issues. Reports and news are sorted by 20 categories, mostly the type of the material repressed, such as political dissent, hate speech, and theater. There are thorough discussions of each issue. The site accepts reports of censorship. The site holds material in many forms: resource guides, statement, toolkits, videos, etc. *Access:* <http://www.ncac.org>.

• **Thomas Jefferson Center for Freedom of Expression.** The center's activities include advocacy through filing amicus briefs and testifying before legislatures and Congressional committees. Many of its amicus briefs are available on the website. It concerns itself as well with specific instances of censorship and offers conferences and colloquiums on issues around freedom of expression. Its staff is available for speaking engagements, and many of the addresses are archived on the website. Its Difficult Dialogues initiative offers academic and other campus programs that promote discus-

sion about controversial issues. The center involves itself in legal issues in the area of arts. It also provides programs celebrating free expression, including its poetry and songwriting contest and its visual arts exhibits. The Land without Liberty is a musical for children that fosters appreciation of free speech rights. It's available to schools for free. The organization lists each year's most serious challenges to free speech through its Jefferson Muzzle Awards. *Access:* <http://tjcenter.org/about/>.

## International

• **Article 19.** Article 19 is involved in many activities throughout most of the world (although not in North America). These include designing laws, furthering their passage, and advocating for legal reform. It supports the victims of repression, tests governments' transparency policies, and works toward the free spread of information. The organization works toward several ends: freedom of expression, including press freedom; fair media regulation; freedom of information; and free debate in democracy. It advocates for fair antidefamation laws and confronts discrimination and violence as methods of suppression and challenges the suppression of free speech in areas of violent conflict. There are several types of material available on the website, including legal analyses, country reports, updates, and statements. The "Library" link on each page allows searches by type, country, region or date, or by more than 100 "Themes," which are issues and other filters. *Access:* <http://www.article19.org>.

• **IFEX.** IFEX is a global network of organizations supporting freedom of expression. It's comprised of 95 member organizations in 60 countries, largely from the global South. Members engage in campaigns and other joint actions. IFEX bolsters associations with conferences, workshops, and resource material. The website offers a thorough campaign toolkit made up of six guides that lead organizations through the

campaign process, from strategy through messaging. There are many news stories on each page, as well as lengthier reports published by member organizations or by IFEX



itself. Material is classified by several subjects, including access to information,

attacks (assaults on writers and other types of content creators), censorship, and digital rights (the right to online expression). Other categories are freedom of assembly (the right to collective expression), free expression and the law, and impunity (occurrences when attacks on freedom of expression go unpunished). The simple search field on the homepage links to the advanced search function, which allows filtering by language, country, and publication date. *Access:* <http://www.ifex.org>.

• **Index on Censorship.** Index on Censorship is an international organization using journalism, campaigning, and advocacy to guard freedom of expression, focusing on select global regions. North America isn't listed as one of these regions, although the site does contain some related material. The organization sponsors debates and other events. It lobbies for legal reform, digital rights, and free artistic expression. The website has a section with reports, many focusing on current issues in individual countries. *Access:* <http://www.indexoncensorship.org>.

• **PEN American Center.** PEN American Center addresses U.S. and international issues. Its Freedom to Write program defends and advocates for writers. The PEN World Voices Festival is an annual showcase of writers. The organization offers literary awards and has a program that encourages diversity. It has programs for translators, prisoners, children, and young adults. The Writers Fund provides financial aid to individual writers in need. The organization's ongoing initiatives address digital freedom and advocate for free speech at

international organizations, among its other programs. It offers a Grants and Awards database (1,500 entries) by subscription. The Advocacy News section of its website offers reports on the suppression of press freedom, and the Press Room holds articles on PEN activities. There's a great deal of educational audiovisual material, including readings and discussions. The site can be searched initially by a keyword field. Its search results page links to the advanced search function, which can search by about 30 types of material. These cover a range from articles and author dinners to venue profiles and webforms. There is also a search engine for the association's database of persecuted writers called Defending Writers, which can be searched by country and by the status of the suppression—e.g., convicted, disappeared, on trial. *Access:* <http://www.pen.org>.

• **PEN International.** PEN International links freedom of expression with literature and education. It is concerned with writers of all kinds—essayists, novelists, bloggers, etc. It regularly runs thematic campaigns. Its website materials include manifestos and declarations, resolutions, and reports. There is also a digital campaign guide on the site. The website has news stories on persecuted writers around the world. Its publications include a "Declaration of Digital Freedom" and a handbook addressing the problem of imprisoned writers. *PEN International* magazine is a biannual literary review. PEN's submissions to The United Nations' Universal Periodic Reviews are available on the site. These reviews are examinations of human rights records in United Nations member countries. Semi-annually, The Writers in Prison Committee publishes an annual list of writers who've been imprisoned or otherwise persecuted. PEN International works with centers in more than 100 countries. It has consultative status with the United Nations and special consultative status with UNSCO. *Access:* <http://www.pen-international.org>. *ZZ*