



City of Virginia Beach

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MUNICIPAL CENTER
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23456-9115

Forum for Community Expression Policy

Purpose of the Policy

Displays in cases and on the tops of tables, and floor and wall-mounted exhibits constitute a forum for community expression in the public library. It is defined as a "limited public forum" and enjoys constitutional protection. The Library may prohibit displays concerning certain subject matter, if it has a reasonable basis for excluding such content, but it may not discriminate based on viewpoint.

The Library plays an important role in assuring a sense of community among citizens and an opportunity for citizens to understand complex public policy issues. It is committed to a neutral viewpoint and provides information on all sides of an issue. The development of displays and exhibits must parallel the development of the Library's materials collection in its commitment to these principles.

The forum offers the citizens of Virginia Beach and their government a unique opportunity to realize important elements of the strategy "Community for a Lifetime." It is one place where the Library can invite expression by local, regional and national groups, and this expression may help "make accurate and positive information available to everyone who has a stake in our future or who is going to make a decision that affects our future. . . because they will know the facts." It can also be a place that invites dialogue on conflicting viewpoints, and therefore helps "to support the creation of common goals, enable better decisions and stimulate partnership for effective Community action." Its premise is the belief that our citizens have the capacity to reason and think for themselves. It is a forum that builds community by assuring "an equal awareness and knowledge" for all. Better community through better information might be its motto.

The free flow of information among members of City government and citizens is important if we are to become a "Community for a Lifetime." Displays and free standing and wall-mounted exhibits can be a contributor to this flow. They can be places where different viewpoints can be shared and understood, and they can be springboards for dialogue, feedback and other forms of expression.

Finally, exhibits and free-standing and wall-mounted exhibits can be places where neighbors share with neighbors their creative expressions. This form of communication is another way that the citizens of a diverse City can learn about the interests and talents of other citizens. This communication is another thread in the fabric of community.

The Library will administer its forum to address five types of expression:

- **Library Marketing:** Exhibits that highlight library resources and are developed by the Library or in co-sponsorship with individuals and organizations.
- **Hobbies:** Displays of the creative expression, art and collections that have been gathered or created by Virginia Beach residents.
- **Annual Exhibits Plan:** Exhibits that are developed by the Library within the context of an annual plan to present all sides of issues important to Virginia Beach residents.
- **Government Information:** Exhibits produced by the government to provide information that increases understanding of current services, ordinances and policies.
- **Community Issues:** Exhibits produced at the request of the government to increase citizen understanding and spark dialogue about government proposals, upcoming City Council agenda items and other complex civic policy issues.

Exhibits that support Hobbies, Government Information and Community Issues will be organized in response to customer and City staff requests, respectively. Exhibits that support Library Marketing and an Annual Exhibits Plan will be initiated by the Library itself. The Annual Exhibits Plan permits the Library to anticipate issues of importance to our citizens and assure coverage of the topic at an appropriate time during the year. The Library may complement any exhibit with a display of its relevant resources and services.

The forum is separate from the Central Library Gallery. That Gallery is administered by its own policy.

Procedures to Support the Policy

Each library agency participating in the forum will establish an annual planning process to determine which types of expression the forum will include and how they will be scheduled throughout the year. This planning may need to correspond with preparation of the annual Resource Management Plan if unusual funding will be required to support the schedule. The Library will accept recommendations from customers for topics to be included in the forum, and these ideas will be evaluated within the annual planning process. Different agencies may select different types of expression to emphasize in their respective forums each year.

Individuals in each agency who participate in the planning and administration of the forum will be trained to consult and negotiate with potential exhibitors to create displays that are most favorable for the exhibitor and aligned with the Library's policy. The Library will do its best to include a range of opinions in each exhibit it plans. The individual planners will be expected to be aware of current civic policy issues in Virginia Beach, and they will consult regularly with colleagues in other agencies to coordinate schedules and share learning. An electronic alias will be established to facilitate this communication, and the overall annual schedule may be shared at a Library communications meeting or within Reaching New Heights.

Planners working with the Library's "Annual Exhibits Plan" or with government in shaping a "Community Issues" exhibit must carefully consider how an issue is framed. The outcome of the exhibit is a boost in citizen understanding. Complex civic issues must be presented so citizens can understand the alternatives of choice and the related consequences of each approach. The very title of the exhibit will need to be chosen so the outcome moves beyond "right choices and wrong choices" and toward "there are different choices with different consequences". The outcome of the exhibit may be to heighten awareness of the difficulty of making a choice as much as clarifying which choice to make.

The Library will manage the "Community Issues" portion of the forum to emphasize topics that are due for future deliberation and decision by the citizens and/or by City Council. It will also include topics that may have been decided by the government but are in question in the public mind. It will not open this portion of the forum to issues that have been decided by political leadership and largely accepted in the public mind. These approaches will inevitably lend themselves to interpretation.

Scheduling for exhibits and displays that will potentially occur in all agencies will be coordinated by the Library Operations Manager in consultation with designated individuals in each library agency. The Library Operations Manager will be responsible for consulting with government and public school representatives to assure that exhibits and displays align with the policy for the forum. Annual schedules for exhibits and displays will assume continuing support of current commitments with the Health Department, City Public Schools, etc. The Library will notify government and school representatives when it is time to consider the annual schedule.

Each exhibit will be accompanied by a statement that clarifies who is responsible for the information and how that individual or organization can be contacted. Once an exhibit or display is scheduled, it will take precedence over late-breaking needs.

The Library may establish electronic and/or face-to-face forums to complement a particular display or exhibit. The purpose of these forums will be to enable citizen comment about what they've seen and to encourage communication among citizens about the issues and learning represented in the exhibits.

Forms - see related documents

Exhibit Registration Form - Citizens and/or citizen groups may use this form to request an exhibit.

Agreement Governing Materials Displayed in the Virginia Beach Public Library - Exhibitors must complete this form and present it to a Library staff member when setting up their display. The Library will keep this form on file and will release the display only to the person signing the form.