

Protocol for Response to Library Incidents

Endorsed by Library Cabinet, October 2023

Within the work environment, Library employees may encounter a situation or an exchange that they experience as hostile, demeaning, or otherwise contrary to the [Library's values](#) and/or [UC Berkeley's principles of community](#). Our organization's past experience with such incidents has taught us that addressing the concerns with select individuals leaves others who witnessed the incident uncertain if any action has been taken, and that waiting too long to intervene can allow the incident to grow, impacting more individuals and multiplying negative effects.

Our Library and our campus are places that encourage a diversity of perspectives and ideas, and our organizations expect ideas to be shared with consideration and care for the ways they are expressed and may be received by others. Each person is influenced by their own background and experiences, and may interpret or be impacted by comments or situations in negative ways even if that was not the other person's intent. Some incidents may be resolved by the individuals themselves, though some may require others to intervene.

For these reasons it behooves us, as a Library, to develop a shared understanding of a general protocol to follow when we are faced with such a situation or exchange in the future. These types of problems may arise in a range of situations — in person or online, with small groups or large groups, between Library employees or involving others. These guidelines will outline general steps; they will need to be adapted to suit the actual situation on the fly. There may be missteps as we work to address a situation, and we can learn from those for the future.

In brief, this process recommends that we:

- lean on the Library values and Berkeley principles of community to guide the action
- formalize a way to communicate a pause or suspension of the activity for a period
- articulate roles and a process for addressing the issue and determining next steps
- articulate roles and a process for addressing the decision/response to Library employees as appropriate and in a timely way.

Steps

- A. Individuals directly involved are encouraged to seek to deescalate the situation and resolve the issue through one-on-one dialogue if possible. If they do not feel comfortable doing so, individuals directly involved are encouraged to consult with their supervisor/manager, the Cabinet-level member to whom they report, and/or with Library HR. We are all responsible for helping the Library live up to its espoused values and we can do that by signaling if we sense a problem and being willing to work collegially, and across traditional organizational boundaries, to address it.
- B. Any Library employee who is a participant in an event or exchange and feels there is something inappropriate, harmful, or otherwise contrary to Library values is encouraged to

raise their concern to the group at that time. They might do so by calling for a pause. For example saying “I sense that this conversation may be veering away from our shared Library values. I would like to pause further discussion now.” Additionally, they should next consult with their supervisor/manager and the Cabinet-level member to whom they report so they will have assistance in working through the next steps and resolution. If the Cabinet-level member was not present at the incident, then the Library employee should gather factual details about the situation, such as specific statements made and the people in attendance.

- C. If relevant to the situation, a Cabinet-level member should formally endorse the pause. In an online forum, such as libstaff@, this might take the form of a generic statement such as “Some Library employees have raised concerns about aspects of recent threads on this list. Following the Library’s protocol, I am pausing further conversation in this forum at this time to give us all a chance to step back, reflect on the exchange, and consider next steps. This list will be temporarily changed to a moderated forum. Members of the Library Cabinet will seek to address the concerns raised, and will share further information as soon as possible.” Rather than expect this action to come from a person in a particular role, any Cabinet-level member may initiate the pause — this shares the responsibility, allows room for anyone who senses a disconnect or harmful issues to raise awareness, and accounts for the fact that people have different schedules that may prevent them from seeing information as soon or acting as quickly.
- D. The Cabinet-level member will consult with the Library Crisis Management Team to gather information and agree on next steps for communication and resolution. This process should happen as soon as possible, but may take several days to ensure a thoughtful response and collaboration with any organizational stakeholders (such as the Library Equity and Inclusion Committee or Library Restorative Justice leads), if relevant. The Library Crisis Management Team is a subset of Library Cabinet and primed for consulting quickly when needed. While maintaining confidentiality as needed, this approach broadens the group of people brainstorming about possible impacts and possible resolutions.
- E. Contact with the parties involved is encouraged to happen in person rather than via email, and ideally will happen with more than one Cabinet-level member in attendance. Supervisors/managers should be consulted, included, and/or updated as seems most appropriate.
- F. A Cabinet-level member — likely the person that initiated the pause or one of the people who participated in the resolution process — will reply with a brief update to the Library employees that were involved in and/or aware of the incident (sometimes this will be all Library staff, sometimes this will be a smaller group). Some situations may require confidentiality or sensitivity so the update may be at a high level. When possible, the update could include elements such as: good outcomes from the resolution, lessons learned, clarification of appropriate behaviors, reminder of this protocol, restoration of activities (such as the return to the email list out of moderation mode), and announcement of any follow-up activities (such as a voluntary restorative justice circle).