Privacy is fundamental to library ethics and intellectual freedom. The Governor’s office has advised businesses and other establishments to consider collecting customer information to assist with contact tracing. However, the Oregon Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee and the Oregon Library Association Executive Board encourage libraries to adopt policies consistent with libraries’ core values and to avoid collecting this information. Collecting data for non-library purposes, including contact tracing, contradicts professional values and may damage the trusting relationships patrons have with their community libraries.

The Library Bill of Rights, adopted by the American Library Association (ALA) in 1939 states that “[a]ll people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use.” Article III of the Library Code of Ethics, also adopted by ALA in 1939, specifies that it is the library’s responsibility to “protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired, or transmitted.” Further elaboration of these statements, provided in ALA’s “Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” (Revised 2019), and “Privacy and Confidentiality: Library Core Values” (Revised 2017), emphasize the critical role that privacy and confidentiality play in protecting intellectual freedom. The latter document affirms that “lack of privacy and confidentiality chills people’s choices, thereby suppressing access to ideas. The possibility of surveillance, whether direct or through access to records of speech, research and exploration, undermines a democratic society.”

Further, in relation specifically to contact tracing, the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom states:

“Collection and sharing of information about library users for purposes other than the delivery of library resources, services, and programming — such as information collected for contact tracing — is inconsistent with that mission and may violate laws protecting user privacy if done without the full and informed consent of the library user. In all cases, access to, and delivery of, library resources and services should not be conditioned on the user’s consent to the collection and use of their information for contact tracing or other purposes unrelated to library service.” – from “[Protecting Privacy in a Pandemic: A Resource Guide"](https://chooseprivacyeveryday.org/protecting-privacy-in-a-pandemic-resource-guide/) (May 8, 2020)

Finally, libraries and their governing bodies should view all potential policies and procedures through the lens of equity, and recognize that data collection creates disproportionate barriers for members of marginalized communities, and could erode hard-earned community trust.

Libraries can and should work with public health officials to disseminate crucial information, modify practices to protect our patrons, and support the work of first responders. However, it is important that through this crisis we protect our patrons and maintain the trust of our community by continuing to uphold our core library values. We recommend against collecting data for non-library purposes, including contact tracing.

Kirsten Brodbeck-Kenney, IFC co-chair

Perry Stokes, IFC co-chair

Ellie Avis

Miranda Doyle

Lori Moore

Steve Silver

Katlyn Temple