

Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's [Intellectual Freedom Committee \(IFC\)](#). Questions can be directed to the IFC member who sent the message or to one of the IFC chairs.



## **New ALA Privacy Guidelines**

On June 24th, the American Library Association released comprehensive new privacy guidelines focused on protecting patron data. According to a [press release](#) from ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom:

The American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee has approved four new library privacy guidelines that outline strategies and best practices for protecting patron privacy in the digital environment. The guidelines address online privacy and data security and are intended to assist librarians, libraries, schools and vendors in developing policies and procedures that safeguard library users' data. The new guidelines include:

- [Library Privacy Guidelines for Public Access Computers and Networks](#)
- [Library Privacy Guidelines for Library Websites, OPACs, and Discovery Services](#)
- [Library Privacy Guidelines for Library Management Systems](#)
- [Library Privacy Guidelines for Data Exchange Between Networked Devices and Services](#)

The IFC Privacy Subcommittee developed the documents, with input from additional ALA committees, divisions, interest groups, and roundtables with an interest in privacy. The guidelines augment the previously released *Library Privacy Guidelines for E-book Lending and Digital Content Vendors* and *Library Privacy Guidelines for Students in K-12 Schools*.

These guidelines address the new reality that libraries' commitment to protecting privacy depends on the security of our networks and the practices of the third party vendors we contract with for so many of our services.

How should libraries respond to these new guidelines? The documents make clear that the devil is in the details. Living up to our values requires not only sound policies and practices, but also extensive technological expertise and eternal vigilance in ensuring that vendors who we entrust with confidential data live up to our standards. ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom Privacy Subcommittee had indicated that additional resources and trainings "to help libraries put the principles outlined in these documents into practice" will be forthcoming.

In the meantime, here are a few possible first steps for responding to the guidance that that ALA has provided:

**Read and familiarize yourself with the [guidelines](#).** Some sections are most relevant for public service staff, others for systems and technology staff members, and all will be of interest to managers and directors. One or more of the guidelines could be an agenda item for an upcoming staff meeting.

**Look for low hanging fruit.** While parts of the guidelines, and certainly their totality, can be intimidating, there are many places to start for better privacy protection. Here are a few examples from the guidelines that are more easily followed:

- “The library should provide browsers and plugins that offer privacy protections when surfing the Web.”
- “The library should establish policies for how long to retain different types of data and methods for securely destroying data that is no longer needed.”
- “Library staff who manage the library's websites and services should receive training on the library's privacy policies and best practices for safeguarding patron privacy. Library staff that negotiate contracts with vendors that provide websites and services should also receive privacy training.”

**Use the guidelines in negotiations with vendors and administrators** These guidelines provide leverage in our interactions with partners as we demand high standards for data protection. The commitments we are asking for are not the quirky preferences of an individual library, but the professional standards of our national organization.

As library staff digest these guidelines and decipher how to make them operational, the old adage to not let the perfect be the enemy of the good comes into play. Libraries are committed to protecting patron data in an environment where sophisticated agents, some malicious and others our trusted partners, are using every tool at their disposal to collect and use that data. The new ALA privacy are of both aspirational and practical value as libraries make incremental steps in support of our professional values.

Questions or comments? Contact the [OLA Intellectual Freedom Committee](#).

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