

**Public Access to the Internet
in Oregon Public Libraries:
A Survey by the OLA Intellectual Freedom Committee,
December 2004**

During the months of October and November 2004, the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Oregon Library Association conducted a survey of the 139 public and volunteer libraries in Oregon. Our goal was to document the manner in which libraries are handling patron access to the Internet, how this may have changed since the last survey on this topic was conducted in 2000, and how libraries are responding to the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

Methodology

The survey questions were designed by the Intellectual Freedom Committee and based on the previous studies conducted by this committee in 1998-99 and 2000. The survey was presented as a web form using the online survey tool, Survey Monkey. A letter of introduction with the URL for the survey was emailed to the directors of the 139 public and volunteer libraries listed by the Oregon State Library in the Oregon Library Directory. In the case of several small volunteer libraries for which no email address was listed, a paper copy of the survey was mailed using the U.S. Postal Service. After the initial survey response was received, non-responding libraries were contacted by phone and the directors were interviewed. Results of the phone interviews were input to the Survey Monkey form. Result analysis was calculated by the Survey Monkey software and by members of the Intellectual Freedom Committee. Comparisons between the 2004 data and earlier data were analyzed by committee members.

Data analysis

The survey population consists of all 139 libraries open to the public in the state of Oregon. Of these, 15 are volunteer libraries and do not receive funding from the state; the remaining 124 libraries are established public libraries. We were unable to reach four of the volunteer libraries and one of the public libraries. One public library declined to participate. Over all 133 (95.6%) of all libraries took part in the study, and 122 (98.3%) of the official public libraries and eleven (73.3%) of the volunteer libraries participated. The 2004 survey group is larger than in previous surveys. In 2000, 130 libraries were surveyed with 122 responding, and in 1998/99, 130 libraries were surveyed with 128 responding. The base population for the survey has changed over time with the closure of some public libraries. Additionally, volunteer libraries were not included in earlier surveys

All 122 of the officially established public libraries (100%) responding to our survey provide access to the Internet, up from 115 (94.2%) in 2000 and 114 (89.0%) in 1998/99. Of the eleven volunteer libraries responding, six (54.5%) provide access to the Internet. Overall, 96.2% of libraries in the state of Oregon provide access to the

Internet.

More libraries have official Internet policies than before.

Oregon has also seen an increase in the number of libraries who have written policies for Internet use. Overall, of the 128 libraries that provide access to the Internet, 122 (95.3%) have some form of a written policy-either an explicit Internet use policy or another library policy that includes Internet use within its scope. 117 (95.9%) public libraries have some form of written policy and five out of six (83.3%) volunteer libraries that provide access to the Internet also have a policy that covers its use. These figures represent a steady increase since the first survey was conducted in 1998/99. In 1998/99, 86 (67.1%) libraries had an Internet policy and in 2000, 101 (82.7%) libraries had policies.

Most libraries in the state have given Internet use special consideration and have constructed specific policies governing its use. 115 (89.8%) libraries providing public access to the Internet have written and ratified an Internet use policy, including 112 (91.8%) public libraries and three (50.0%) volunteer libraries who have access to the Internet.

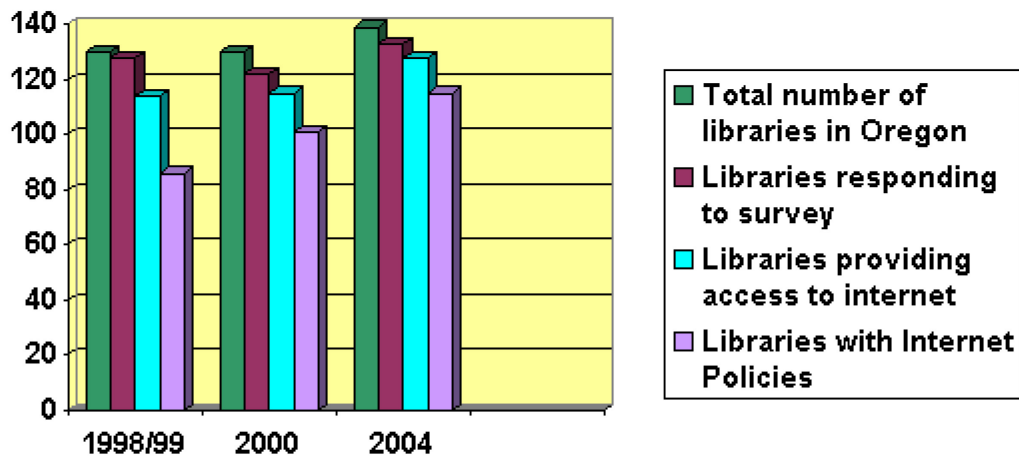


Figure 1. Libraries providing access to the Internet in Oregon

The majority of libraries (93.8%) have had an Internet policy in place for two or more years. However, six libraries have instituted new policies addressing Internet use since the beginning of 2003. 115 libraries answered our question asking whether they had ever revised their policy. Of these 115 libraries with written Internet policies many had revisited their policy at least once and made revisions. 84 (73.0%) libraries had revised their policies. Libraries recognize that these policies need to evolve over time and have responded by updating them periodically. In fact 30 libraries had revised their policies within the last year and many indicated that they revisited their policies regularly, with

five stating that they do it annually.

Many libraries worked with stake-holders from outside the library's employees in creating the policies they have in place. Library management took part in the creation of Internet policies at 98 libraries (85.2%) and library staff were involved at 81 (69.6%) libraries. Notably, library boards were involved in writing libraries' Internet policies at 101 or 87.8% of institutions surveyed. Additionally seven libraries (6.1%) worked with community groups; six libraries (5.2%) collaborated with their Friends of the Library group; 39 libraries (33.9%) worked with city or county officials and 22 libraries mentioned other involved parties ranging from the local school district to public comment.

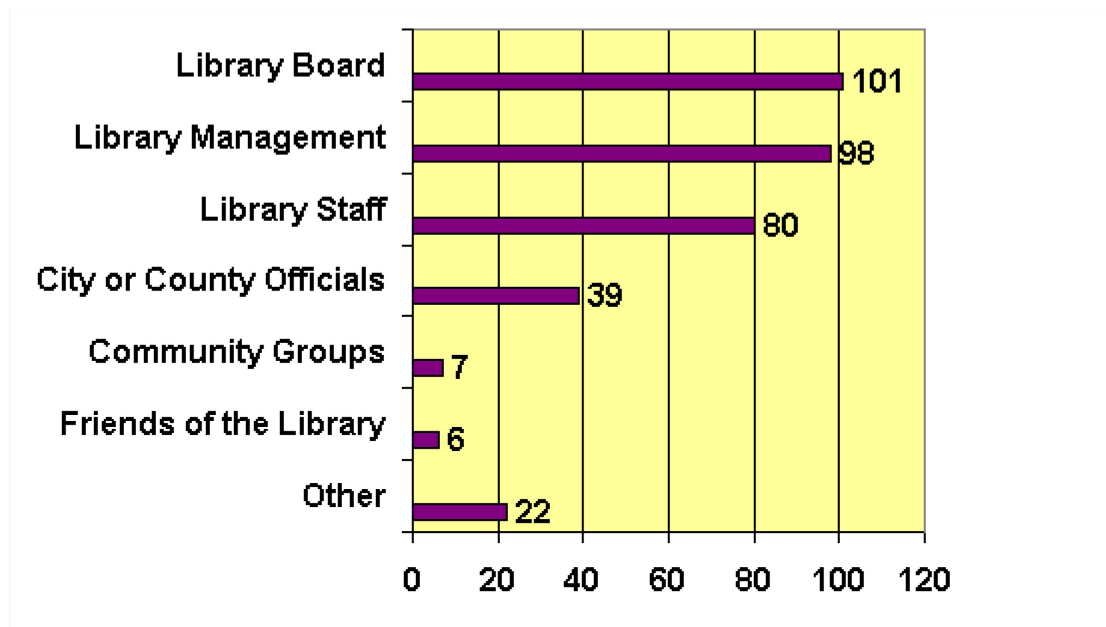


Figure 2. Groups involved in developing library Internet policies

Library Internet policies are made available to the public by a number of different means. The greatest number of responses indicated that the policy is available at a service desk or is posted in the library. Several libraries also have it posted on their website. A number of libraries have made reading the policy a part of accessing the Internet, either by requiring users to read it before signing up or signing an Internet use disclaimer, or by putting it up on the library's login page. Many libraries provide paper copies to patrons as simple handouts, in brochures, or in one library, as a bookmark. For most libraries these methods are the extent of their efforts to publicize their policies, though several mentioned other forms of publicity for their policies. Several libraries wrote that the policy was written up in the local newspaper when it was first developed. One librarian presents the library's policies, including the Internet policy, at story hour several times a year.

Filtering and the Children's Internet Protection Act

Concern about children's access to inappropriate material on the Internet has existed almost since the advent of the World Wide Web. A number of efforts have been made to legislate content, or access to content on the web, among them, the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). CIPA requires the use of Internet filters or blocking technology on all computers providing Internet access to the public if a library receives either a) Universal Service discounts (E-rate) for Internet access or service, or b) Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds for equipment or services that provide access to the Internet to the public.

A version of this survey was first conducted in the winter of 1998/99 before CIPA was introduced in response to earlier legislation which dealt with material harmful to minors on the Internet. CIPA was introduced in 1999 and enacted by Congress in December of 2000, but was challenged in court on First Amendment grounds. The case proceeded all the way to the Supreme Court, where it was upheld with a plurality opinion. This iteration of the survey is the first to be conducted since the law has gone into effect.

Libraries are responsive to their communities

Of the 122 public libraries that responded to the survey, only 18 (14.7%) receive federal dollars in the form of LSTA grants or e-rate discounts for Internet access. 115 libraries stated that they do not receive any funds that require that they comply with CIPA. However despite not being required to filter by law, libraries are responding to the prevailing attitudes of their own communities. 56 libraries (48.6%) not receiving federal funds requiring compliance with CIPA offer some degree of filtering to their patrons. Overall 55.6% of libraries in the state of Oregon offer some degree of filtering at public workstations. This represents a significant increase since the last survey in 2000 when 25.2% of all libraries offered some degree of filtering. In the original survey in 1998/99 18% of Oregon libraries provided filters on some or all of their public workstations.

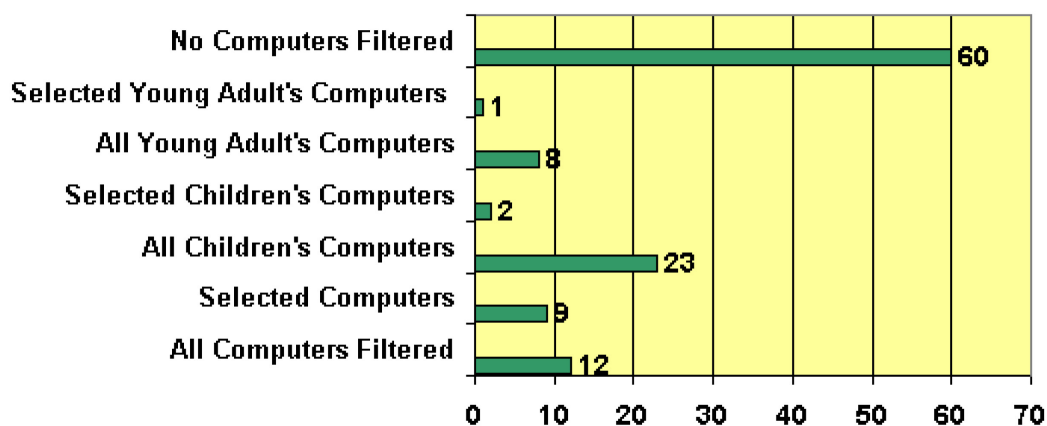


Figure 3. Libraries providing some degree of filtering

Of the 115 libraries who do not receive federal funds that require compliance with CIPA, 112 answered our question regarding whether they filter work stations in the library. Twelve libraries (10.7%) filter all computers; 9 libraries (8.0%) filter selected public work stations; 23 libraries (20.5%) filter all their children's computers; 2 libraries (1.8%) filter selected children's computers; 8 libraries (7.1%) filter all the work stations in their young adult area and one library (0.9%) filters selected young adult computers. Some of these choices are affected by the total number of computers in the library. A number of libraries have no young adult computers and many have only one computer for adults and one for children. A number of libraries provided additional information about the choices they made regarding filtering options for their patrons including toggled filters that allow adult users to choose between filtered or unfiltered access as well as other methods of providing users with a choice. Libraries also employ a variety of methods for providing safe access to children. Some libraries do not provide any Internet access to children, or provide a "children's page" that links to a limited and previewed group of sites on the Internet. One library wrote that they do not automatically filter children's access but that they will at the parent's request.

Sixty libraries (53.6%) do not filter any of their workstations.

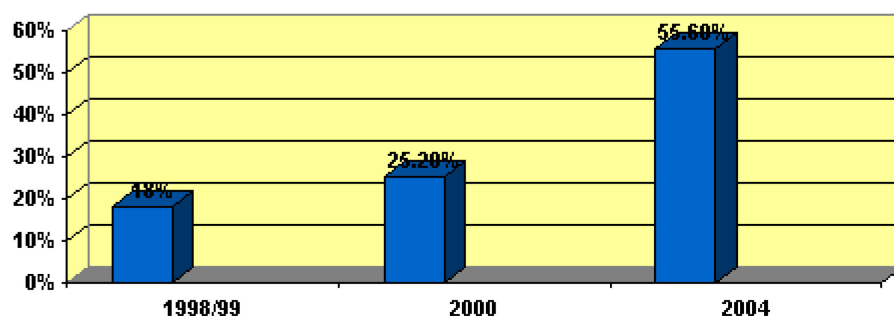


Figure 4. Filtered Computers in Libraries not required to comply with CIPA

Librarians monitor Internet use

Internet use in libraries is monitored in a number of ways. The most common methods are also some of the most traditional. 99 libraries (78%) set up their terminals in a public thoroughfare, limiting the user's ability to view inappropriate material in privacy. Likewise, 88 libraries (69.3%) place their workstations in view of a public service desk, and 98 libraries (77.2%) use staff intervention or the "tap on the shoulder" to discourage patrons from viewing inappropriate material.

Libraries have also made efforts to promote responsible use of the Internet. 38 libraries (29.9%) require all users to click through a statement of responsibility when they sit down to use one of the public workstations, and one library requires patrons to take

training before using the Internet. 25 libraries (19.7%) ask adult Internet users to sign a disclaimer and 46 libraries (36.2%) ask parents to sign a waiver before their children have access to the Internet.

31 libraries (24.4%) provide Internet access only to their own patrons, requiring a library card for use of the Internet. This may provide additional safety measures, in addition to reserving available resources to the library's primary constituency.

92 libraries (72.4%) limit the number of patrons at one workstation. This measure is generally designed to control behavior, which could be associated with viewing inappropriate material.

Finally, some libraries have implemented privacy measures. 19 libraries (15%) have installed privacy screens and four (3.1%) have recessed monitors. This allows patrons to have free access to all legally protected free speech, even that which may be offensive to others, without disturbing other patrons in the library.

Adult patrons may request unfiltered access to the Internet

Of the 18 libraries that receive federal funds and are required to comply with CIPA, 15 answered our question asking how they respond to requests for unfiltered access to the Internet. Four libraries indicated that they do not or cannot turn off their filters. One of these libraries is a joint public and school district library and they abide by the stricter rules that govern Internet use in the school district. Several libraries volunteered the information that they verify that the patron is 18 or older before turning off the filter. In response to children and young adults that request access to filtered sites, one library indicated that they respond by conducting a reference interview with the minor patron, find appropriate information on the Internet and print it for their patron. Several libraries indicated that they had never been asked to turn off a filter. As for the method of turning off filters, those that provided details wrote that many use an override password. Some indicated that the filter can be turned off for a brief period and is turned back on automatically. In 12 libraries (80%) that comply with CIPA, the library manager has the authority to turn the filter off; in eight (53.3%), library staff has this authority. None of these libraries place this ability in the hands of the patron.

Safety for children in libraries

Libraries and librarians are aware of a number of safety issues for children in libraries including, but not exclusively, the viewing of age inappropriate material on the Internet. Though it is true that inappropriate material may be found accidentally, and children's and young adult librarians are certainly aware that some young people may seek out inappropriate material out of curiosity, librarians are also concerned that there may be adults who would attempt to expose children to inappropriate material, or who have an unwholesome interest in being near children. 70 libraries answered our question about whether adults unaccompanied by a child may use a computer workstation in the children's area. 32 libraries (45.7%) said that this is allowed in their libraries and 38

(54.3%) said that it is not. 45 libraries answered the same question concerning computers in the young adult area. 25 libraries (55.6%) allow adults to use computers in the young adult area when unaccompanied by a teen and 20 libraries (44.5%) do not.

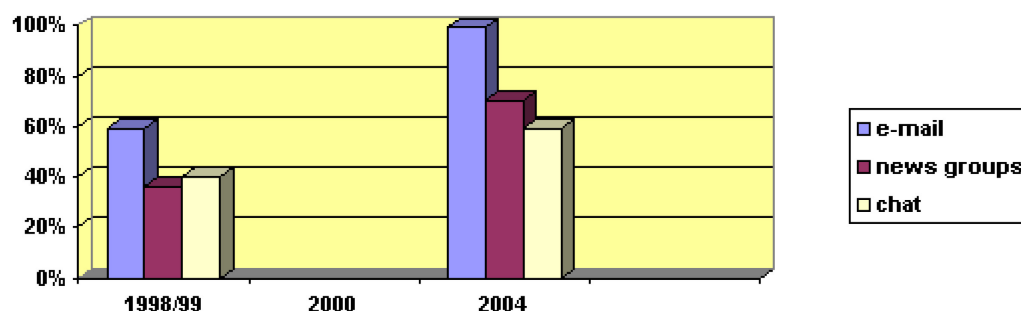


Figure 5. Types of Internet use allowed (no data is available from the 2000 survey)

Safety issues concerning the Internet include more than the viewing of inappropriate material. Parents may also be concerned about the dangers that children and young adults may find in online chat rooms. 51 libraries (40.8%) do not allow their patrons to visit chat rooms. In addition to WWW browsing, libraries allow their patrons to use the Internet for email (99.2%), news groups (70.4%) and for playing online games (88.8%).

114 libraries responded to our question asking whether they restrict children's access to library materials in any other way. 40 libraries (35.1%) place other restrictions on children's access to library materials. The most common restrictions include a requirement that children under a certain age (varies) are accompanied by an adult, and that children may not check out "R" rated videos. A few libraries restrict children to checking out only materials from the juvenile collection.

Librarians promote responsible Web use

One method of preventing patrons from viewing harmful material on the Internet is the use of blocking technology. Another is to teach patrons how to browse the web responsibly. 80 libraries stated that they provide printed information regarding issues of Internet safety to their patrons. 21 libraries (26.2%) provide information for parents; 19 (23.8%) provide information for children and 61 (76.2%) provide information about Internet safety for both.

Additionally, many libraries provide Internet training to various groups, teaching them searching technique as well as the safe and responsible use of Internet based resources. 72 Oregon libraries provide Internet training sessions to their patrons. 63 libraries (87.5%) provide training for the general public; 35 (48.6%) provide training for adults; 21 libraries (27.8%) provide training for children and 20 (27.8%) provide training sessions for families or specifically oriented to parents. A number of libraries volunteered that though they do not provide organized training sessions, they provide

much of the same information when working with patrons one on one.

Libraries and their communities are in accord

Libraries are responding in many ways to concerns about materials in the Internet that may be harmful to minors and conversely to their communities' concerns that they have continued access to all speech that is legally protected under the First Amendment. Some libraries have found that the sentiment in their town or city demands that they provide blocking technology at all times for all patrons, other communities require only limited filtering, and some do not want access filtered at all. Because libraries have been careful to understand and respond to the specific needs of their own communities, Oregonians have been supportive of their libraries' actions. We asked libraries whether the feedback they have had regarding information available on the Internet has been mostly positive, somewhat positive, equally balanced, somewhat or mostly negative. Of 125 libraries who answered this question, none reported somewhat negative or mostly negative response from their patrons. Overwhelmingly, 97 libraries (77.6%) reported that their patrons had provided mostly positive feedback. 21 libraries (16.8%) had received somewhat positive feedback and 7 libraries (5.6%) had equally balanced feedback regarding information available online.

On the specific issue of filtering very few libraries have experienced any kind of organized protest from their communities. When libraries were asked whether there had been any organized protest or support for their policies and practices regarding the Internet, only 12 (9.8%) responded in the affirmative. However, when asked to elaborate, only seven wrote about opposition to their policies; five wrote that they had received support for their policies and practices and several others wrote about having experienced isolated complaints about their decisions regarding filtering. Several libraries that had experienced organized protest discussed the issues with their communities and came up with solutions that have satisfied their patrons.

Summary

The Internet has become a standard research tool in libraries. All publicly funded libraries in the state of Oregon provide their patrons with access to the Internet, and most have developed policies governing its use. Very few Oregon libraries utilize federal funds that require compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act. However, libraries have developed practices that reflect the values of their communities and more than half of the libraries in the state offer some degree of filtering... Libraries have responded to concerns voiced by their patrons in ways that are as individual as the towns and cities where the libraries are located. Most importantly, only a few libraries reported any patron dissatisfaction with their policies regarding the internet, and these libraries have responded by adapting their practices, leaving their patrons pleased with the results.

January 24, 2005

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