Summary of 2008 Public Library Internet Survey
Oregon Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee

In October and November 2004, the Oregon Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) conducted a survey of public library Internet usage policies, the purpose of which was to determine how libraries in the state were handling patron access to the Internet and how these libraries were responding to the requirements of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). Four years later, the IFC issued a follow-up survey to determine how or if the situation had changed. The new survey also included questions related to the use of social networking sites.

This is a summary of some of the more significant findings in that 2008 survey.

Out of the 138 public and volunteer libraries in the state, 117 were contacted and 105[*] replied (91.4%).
- Library cooperatives or other special districts that do not directly operate libraries were excluded from the survey.
- All 16 volunteer libraries in the state received copies of the survey by mail, but for reasons unknown to us, none chose to participate. In order to complete the survey process in a timely fashion, committee members decided not to follow up with these libraries.
- By way of comparison, 95.6% of libraries took part in the 2004 survey, though that number included volunteer facilities and library cooperatives.

The vast majority of respondents (94.3%) have a written Internet policy
- Most of these policies (91.8%) have been in place 3 or more years.
- 78.6% of respondents indicated that their library has revised their Internet policy.
- Roughly 58% of respondents indicated that this policy had been revised within the past two years
- These numbers are quite comparable to the 2004 survey.

In terms of who develops these policies, respondents indentified library management (85.0%), library boards (84.0%), and library staff (75.0%) as the major stakeholders.
- These were the top three responses in 2004, though library boards were involved to a slightly greater degree – library boards (87.8%), library management (85.2%), and library staff 69.6%)
- 29.0% of those responding indicated that city and/or county officials are involved with developing library Internet policies.
- Eight respondents listed community groups and/or Friends of the Library as stakeholders in developing policies.
- Other parties were identified as well- city attorney, IT staff person, library advisory board, and county library directors and computer administrator.
- Of the 5 respondents who indicated that they do not have specific policies governing Internet usage, 3 mentioned that they have other policies that do address it in some fashion

In looking at how libraries make their Internet policies available to the public, most of the respondents indicated that copies of these policies are posted at a service desk or throughout the building.
- 38.6% indicated that their Internet policies are also available online.

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[*] One responding library submitted 2 surveys, one at the beginning and one at the end of the survey period.

- Libraries seem to be taking a more proactive stand about making their Internet policies accessible and available to patrons.
- While most respondents indicated that the public sees some form of the policy while using library resources, few libraries seem to be engaged in actively "publicizing" (i.e., promoting) these policies.

In response to questions regarding the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), 86.7% of those responding indicated that they do not receive federal funds that require compliance. In 2004, 85.3% indicated that they did not.
- 48 of the libraries (44.8%) not receiving federal funds still provide some form of filtered access to their patrons. This is down from 56 libraries (48.6%) in 2004.
- 19 libraries (21.3%) require filtered access on all children's computers, down slightly from 2004 (23 libraries).
- 9 libraries require filtered access on all computers, and 9 indicated that they require filtered access on all young adult computers. In 2004, 12 libraries filtered all computers, and 8 indicated that they filter all young adult terminals.
- None of the respondents indicated that they filter staff computers.
- In 2004, 60 libraries indicated that they do not filter any of their workstations; in 2008, that number has dropped to 43 (48.3%).
- Of the 71 libraries that do not require filtered access on any of their Internet computers, the majority (76.1%) indicated that they do not offer a choice of filtered access.

Fifty-three libraries (70.7%) indicated that adults accompanied by children may use computers in the children's area, while 22 said that this was not allowed. This is up significantly from 2004, where 32 said it was allowed and 38 said it was not.
- 36 libraries allow adults accompanied by young adults to use computers in the young adult area, 15 do not. In 2004, 25 libraries allowed this, and 20 did not.

When asked if children are restricted to children's computers with filtering, 42 libraries answered that they are not, 20 that they are.
- In a follow-up question, libraries were asked at what age children can gain unrestricted access to the Internet. Some indicated that the decision was up to the parent, while others offered more general answers such as "junior high school" or "when they begin using the adult lab."
- 38 of the libraries that do not receive federal funding still restrict access to children's materials in other ways, including having an adult accompany the child or having the child return a signed permission slip from a parent or guardian.

On the question of Internet training, a great many libraries indicated that they provide training sessions of some sort to their patrons.
- 54 libraries provide training to the general public. In 2004, this number was 63.
- 21 provide training to families and parents (20 in 2004).
- 20 provide training to adults (35 in 2004).
- 10 provide training to children (21 in 2004).
- Interestingly, the number of respondents was lower in 2008 than in 2004. Just over 50% of those taking part in the survey skipped this question, though the reasons for doing this are not entirely clear.

Turning to the issue of monitored and/or regulated Internet usage, libraries responded in a variety of ways.

- 73 (70.2%) said that they place a limit on the number of patrons at one workstation.
- 68 (65.4%) indicated that terminals are set up in a public thoroughfare.
- 66 (63.5%) rely on staff intervention (tap on the shoulder) to regulate Internet usage.
- 61 (58.7%) have terminals set up so that they can be seen from the reference desk.
- Other means of monitoring and/or regulating Internet usage include having patrons click through a statement of responsibility (45 libraries), requiring a library card (37 libraries), having adult users sign a disclaimer (16 libraries), and employing privacy screens (12 libraries).
- Only 1 library indicated that patrons are required to take training before using the Internet.

One of the main goals of this new survey was to find out how libraries are using and providing access to social networking sites and to determine if these new modes of technology present any additional problems or concerns.

A significant number of libraries indicated that they allow patron access to social networking sites.

- MySpace, Facebook, and Friendster are the three most commonly accessed social networking sites.
- Libraries are also allowing their patrons to use Flickr and Second Life.
- In addition, libraries indicated that patrons have access to other technology-based media, such as e-mail, games, chat, and IM.

Of the 107 respondents, only 22 libraries (23.4%) indicated that they restrict access to social networking sites.

- 14 libraries indicated that they restrict by age, while 37 do not.
- Of those who do not restrict by age, 15 indicated that blocking software limits access, and 12 limit access through staff intervention.
- A small number of libraries reported that MySpace presents a special challenge, especially since teens and young adults will always find a way to access it, even in the face of restrictions or limitations

Only a handful of respondents indicated that their library has a social networking presence.

- 14 libraries (38.9%) mentioned MySpace, 12 (33.3.%) listed blogs and/or wikis, and 10 (27.8%) cited Flickr.
- So far, public response to this social networking presence has been mostly positive.

Lastly, we asked libraries to comment on the kind of feedback they've received from patrons about library-related information on the Internet.

- 67% indicated that the feedback has been mostly positive.
- None of the libraries mentioned that they had received somewhat negative or mostly negative feedback from their patrons.
- Out of the 107 respondents, only 5 indicated that they had been on the receiving end of organized community opposition for library policies or practices.