

Privacy Support Checklist

These are several ways to enhance user privacy in a public library. Your institution's needs will determine which if any of these ideas are useful for your library.

- Privacy training included as part of new staff orientation
- Library cards issuable to non-street addresses. This can be potentially be done by issuing institutional library cards, as is sometimes done in the cases of shelters or nursing homes. This allows patrons without a permanent address of their own to check out materials, while still giving the library a point of contact and a body to hold accountable for any lost or damaged materials.¹
- Printers that don't permit other members of the public to view another patron's printing. This may mean placing the printer behind the circulation desk, but ideally staff will exercise discretion and not view printed materials either.
- No registration required for programs or computer access, or at least not public displays of registration.
- For books requested via ILL, patron names aren't publicly viewable. Put the requesting patron's name on the side of a materials, rather than on a book spine, where it might be seen by anyone passing by.
- No paging of library patrons. Victims hiding from abusers, and families involved in custody disputes, may be put in danger.
- Public computers have privacy settings in place. For instance, computers are set to delete cookies and browsing history after each use session.

¹ For examples of libraries with such borrowing options, see the institutional card policies of [San Jose State University Library](#) or the multiple borrowing options offered by the [Indiana Trails Public Library](#).

Self-Evaluation

This offers a quick check for individual staff to ensure that each person grasps key concepts.

1. Which of these is the best location for a printer available for public use?
 - a. In the center of the computer area, so everyone can easily access it.
 - b. Behind the circulation desk, so access to printed materials is more controlled.
 - c. In front of the circulation desk, so librarians can monitor use.

2. City Library is hosting a computer class, and wants to know who will be attending so they can have enough materials on hand and use the information for their library contact lists and usage metrics. What information should registrants *not* be asked to provide?
 - a. Their full names
 - b. Experience level for the information being taught
 - c. Where they heard about the program

3. A person comes up to the desk and says his or her spouse has an overdue library book, but isn't sure what the title is and wants to know what they should be looking for at home. What would be the best response?
 - a. Tell them what the book is—even give a description of the cover, if you can. You don't want the patron to have to pay for the book!
 - b. "I'm sorry, we can't provide patron record information to other individuals, except in the case of legal guardians."
 - c. "Of course—I'll just need to see your identifying information, and have you confirm the name and contact information of your spouse."

4. Which of the following should be included in a new employee's training?
 - a. An overview of the legal guidelines, such as the Patriot Act, that may require—or prohibit—them from sharing information about patrons.
 - b. Real-life examples of problematic privacy situations and how they should be resolved.
 - c. a and b.

Self-Evaluation Answer Sheet

1. **b.** If the printer is out in the open, anyone might walk by and see potentially confidential information, such as credit card numbers, Social Security numbers, or other personal information.
2. **a.** Names are a common way for people to register for almost anything—but if this material has the chance of being seen by anyone other than library staff, don't require full names. A patron might be embarrassed to be taking a class—if, for instance, they feel sensitive about lacking basic computer skills—or it might be a serious safety issue for those fleeing abusers.
3. **b.** If applicable, let the patron know that the spouse can check his or her password-protected account status online if coming into the library would be inconvenient—but don't give out confidential information to third parties, even if they can prove their relationship. The library may be a battered spouse's only safe place to locate information about starting a new life—if you gave information about the books they're reading to the abuser, you might unwittingly exacerbate the situation at home.
4. **c.** New employees need a thorough understanding of privacy concerns and expectations in the library. This means they need both the legal *and* the practical knowledge.