

Internet Use Policy Toolkit

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Purpose

This document is intended for use by public libraries in British Columbia to aid in the development or revision of public Internet use policies.

A comprehensive Internet use policy should:

1. Outline restrictions on Internet use within the library;
2. Prohibit the use of library computers for illegal activity;
3. Emphasise the rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians in determining what is appropriate for their children;
4. Articulate the patron's right to privacy and the library's efforts to maintain confidentiality.

A good Internet use policy balances freedom of access with the maintenance of a safe and welcoming library for all.

Please note that no one policy is suitable for all libraries. This guide is meant as a starting point only. These guidelines provide information to public libraries and do not constitute legal advice.

Getting Started

Developing or revising an Internet use policy can be a daunting task. Begin by familiarizing yourself with the legal issues surrounding the provision of Internet access in public libraries.

Legal Issues

An excellent starting point to understanding the laws that impact Internet use in public libraries is the Canadian Library Association's [Net Safe; Net Smart. Managing & Communicating About the Internet in the Library](#) which contains an article entitled "Legal Issues Resulting from Internet Use in Public Libraries" written by Toronto lawyer Ronald Kantner.

Public libraries are governed by laws at local, provincial and federal levels. In British Columbia, the [Library Act](#) enables public libraries to establish rules of conduct and to enforce those rules through the imposition of fines, suspension of library privileges or the exclusion from the library "anyone who behaves in a disruptive manner or damages library property."

Box 1

The Criminal Code and Internet Content

The Criminal Code has four provisions restricting communications (including the Internet). Prohibited behaviour includes: Obscenity; child pornography, hate propaganda and sedition. See Ronald Kantner's article "[Legal Issues Resulting from Internet Use in Public Libraries](#)" for more detail how these terms have been interpreted in case law.

Creating Your Library's Internet Use Policy

The following pages contain a sample outline and suggestions for what you could include in your policy.

Where sample text has been taken from an existing policy, the source library is referenced.

It is generally advisable to exclude descriptions of specific procedures from any policy, including Internet use policies (see Box 2 below).

Box 2

Separating Policy from Procedure

Policy: Provides overall context or framework that guides the library's actions. Policies are statements of principle and priorities.

Procedure: Describes specific processes and are based on the overall principles outlined in the policy.

Distinctions between policy and procedure are subtle, but there are some characteristics to distinguish between the two:

Policy

- Broad application
- Changes less frequently
- Describes principles
- Statements of "what" and/or "why"

Procedure

- Narrow application
- Changes more frequently
- Describes process
- Statements of "how", "when", "where", "who"

What to Include

1. Disclaimer(s)

It is important to ensure that your policy lets Internet users know that the library is not responsible for Internet content (see Box 3 below). This section gives examples of disclaimers other libraries have used in their policies.

Box 3

Types of Disclaimer in Internet Use Policies

Begin your policy with disclaimers against the reliability of Internet content and damage resulting from using the Internet in the library.

Disclaimers could include:

1. Warnings that Internet content may be offensive
2. Warnings that Internet content may be unreliable and/or out-of-date
3. Statements that the library is not responsible for content accessed via the Internet
4. Warnings that the library is not responsible for damages resulting from using the Internet

Include a warning that Internet content may be offensive or unreliable

Sample 1: The Internet provides access to a wealth of information. Because the Internet is a vast, dynamic and unregulated information network, it allows access to ideas, information and images beyond the scope of the Library's collection development policies. (Surrey Public Library)

Sample 2: The Internet is an unregulated worldwide environment. It contains information and opinions that range in scope from reliable and authoritative to controversial and extremely offensive. Some information found on the Internet may not be accurate, complete or current. Users must assess the validity of the information found. (VPL)

Sample 3: The library does not monitor and has no control over the information accessed through the Internet and cannot be held responsible for its content. The Internet is a global entity with a highly diverse user population and library customers use it at their own risk. (Thompson-Nicola Regional District Library)

You may choose to end the content disclaimer with a statement that the library is not responsible for content accessed on the internet:

Sample 1: For these reasons <library name> is not responsible for the content or quality of information accessed on the Internet.

Include in the disclaimer section warnings that the library is not responsible for damages, fees or security associated with use of the Internet:

Sample 1: Although the library uses a virus checker on the Internet access computers, this may not completely protect against the chance of getting a virus. The library is not responsible for damage to a patron's disk or computer or for any loss of data, damage or liability that may occur from patron use of the library's computers. In addition, it is the patron's responsibility to ensure their private information is protected. (Castlegar & District Public Library)

Sample 2: The library assumes no responsibility for any damages, direct or indirect, arising from its connections to the Internet, nor the accuracy and effectiveness of any installed filter. The <name> Library cannot be held liable for any information that may be lost, damaged or unavailable due to technical or other difficulties. (Surrey Public Library)

Sample 3: The library is not responsible for any fees incurred by use of the Internet. The library cannot guarantee security and confidentiality of any transaction, particularly e-commerce transactions. (VPL)

Sample 4: The library does not guarantee that the mechanical functions of this service will be uninterrupted or that the service will meet any specific requirements of users; the library will not be liable for any direct, indirect, incidental or consequential damages sustained or incurred in connection with the use of or inability to use the service.

2. Introduction

Why does the library provide Internet access? Follow your disclaimer(s) with a statement about how Internet access fits into the mission of the library.

Sample 1: The <name> Library endeavours to develop collections, resources and services that meet the informational, recreational, educational and cultural needs of the Library's diverse community. It is within this context that the Library offers access to the Internet. (Cariboo Regional District Library)

Sample 2: As part of <name> Library's role in providing free access to information, Internet workstations are provided for public use in the library. (Coquitlam Public Library)

Sample 3: Public Internet service is provided by the library as part of its mission to serve as a gateway to the world's cultural, educational and recreational resources. Use of this service is a privilege that may be revoked by the library. The following regulations have been developed to ensure that there is equitable access to this recourse and that appropriate use is made of this technology. (Greater Victoria Public Library)

3. Access (Booking Guidelines & Time Limits)

Tip: Remember to avoid detailed descriptions of procedures in your policy. Keep policies focused on guiding principles. Doing so will give you greater flexibility to modify day-to-day procedures in the library.

Computer availability

Avoid stating the number of available computers as this may change as funding levels fluctuate or due to technological problems.

Sample:

Public Internet workstations are available in the library. Decisions regarding the number and placement of workstations will be made in accordance with space availability, overall library priorities, telecommunications capability and available funding. (VPL)

Booking & Login

This section could include information whether computers may be reserved in advance and/or whether a library card & password are required. Avoid a detailed description of your booking or login procedure as they may change.

Sample 1: Patron login (library barcode & password) is required for Internet use. Internet access for non-library members may be allowed, depending on availability.

Sample 2: Users must have a currently active library card to access the Internet. Visitors may use Internet stations if scheduling permits, by presenting one piece of identification. (Cariboo Regional District Library)

Time Limits

A flexible policy will indicate only that time limits are in place, without stating the exact limit.

Sample 1: Daily time limits on the use of workstations have been implemented to meet customer demand. (Coquitlam Public Library)

Sample 2: Use limits will be determined by staff as appropriate.

Usage Fees

Most public libraries offer Internet access for free, with a cost for printing. As with time limits, you can specify the exact fees in your policy or you can choose to state only that there are fees in place.

Sample 1: Public Internet access is free; however, there is a nominal cost for printing. (Coquitlam Public Library)

Limits for those with fines or overdues

Some library systems limit access for those with fines over a certain amount or with overdue items.

Sample 1: Library patrons must have a valid library card with no overdue items or fines owing. (Chetwynd Public Library)

Sample 2: Internet privileges may be suspended if maximum allowable fines are exceeded or if a Bill for Replacement or a Collection Agency warning has been issued. (Surrey Public Library)

4. Parental Responsibility and Child Safety on the Internet

Include in this section a description of your library's filtering practices.

Sample 1 (for libraries without filtering): All members of the public, including children, will have access to workstations with no content limitations. Children who use the Internet unsupervised may be exposed to inappropriate or disturbing information. (Chetwynd Public Library)

Sample 2 (for libraries without filtering): Parents or legal guardians are responsible for their children's use of the Internet. Children will use the Internet on the same basis as adults without any censorship or supervision by library staff. It is strongly recommended that children under 12 be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. (Cariboo Regional District Library)

Sample 2 (for libraries with filtering on children's terminals): Internet workstations in adult areas will not have any content limitations on access to the Internet except as outlined in the section "Restrictions." Internet workstations in children's areas will have a commercial content filter. This policy is consistent with our book and materials collection policy which stresses children's collections be appropriate for age and interests of children. While filters block much of the material that may be considered inappropriate for children, filters are not 100% effective. (VPL)

Sample 4 (for libraries with filtering on children's terminals): Children's Internet terminals are equipped with commercial filters. Even with such filters in place, <name> Library cannot guarantee that the material accessed will not be objectionable to some parents. (Greater Victoria Public Library)

Box 4

Publicize your library's filtering practices

Internet filtering can be unreliable – make sure library patrons know if filtering is in place in your library, but that it is not completely effective.

Include a statement stressing parental guidance in using the Internet

Sample 1: As with other Library materials, parents or guardians are responsible for supervising their children's selection of information on the Internet.

Sample 2: The library affirms the responsibility of parents and legal guardians to monitor their children's use of library materials and resources. Parents are encouraged to work closely with their children in selecting and viewing material that is consistent with personal and family values and boundaries. (Creston Public Library)

Some library systems require a signed parental consent form before children are permitted to access the internet. If your library has this requirement, indicate it in your internet use policy.

Sample 1: Anyone under the age of 18 must have their library registration card completed and signed by a parent or guardian in the presence of library staff before they are allowed to use the Internet.

Sample 2: Children 12 years of age and under must be supervised by a parent/guardian. Students 13 – 18 years of age must have a Parental Consent Form to access the Internet. This form must be signed in person by their parent/guardian. Please note that parents are responsible for any damages that may result if children misuse equipment. (Elkford Public Library)

5. Restrictions

This section should outline the types of activities that the library does not permit (such as illegal activity). Here is a list of activities prohibited by some libraries, choose those that are applicable for your library:

i. Using Internet workstations for illegal activities

Sample 1: Internet users are subject to federal, provincial and municipal legislation related to Internet use, including the provisions of the Criminal Code regarding obscenity, child pornography, sedition and the incitement of hatred. (Surrey Public Library)

Sample 2: Unacceptable use of the Internet in the library includes posting or transmitting unlawful, threatening, abusive, libellous, defamatory, obscene material and/or child pornography.

ii. Knowingly exposing others to offensive material

Sample 1: The library strives to balance the rights of users to access a wide range of information resources with the rights of users to work in a public environment free from harassing sounds and visuals. We ask that you remain sensitive to the fact that you are working in a public space shared by people of all ages, with a variety of information interests and needs. (Chetwynd Public Library)

Sample 2: The library's computers are located in public areas shared by library users of all ages, backgrounds and sensibilities. Individuals are asked to consider other library users when accessing the Internet from public workstations. (VPL)

Sample 3: All users must adhere to community standards for the intentional display of sexually explicit themes and content. Examples of images that fall outside of this community standard and are specifically prohibited are displays of explicit sexual scenes or any image prohibited under Section 5(3) of the Motion Picture Act of British Columbia (SBC Chapter 17). In general, no image that could not be classified as "General" under the provisions of Section 3(a) of Regulations promulgated under the Motion Picture Act of British Columbia (SBC Chapter 17) may be intentionally displayed. (Greater Victoria Public Library)

iii. Copyright violations

Sample 1 : Users of the Internet must respect the legal protection provided by copyright and licensing of programs and data. (VPL)

Sample 2: Users are subject to the provisions of the Canadian Copyright Act. (Surrey Public Library)

Sample 3: Users shall respect intellectual and property rights and laws and shall not infringe copyrights or software licenses. Users are responsible for assessing whether programs or data have copyright on them. (Greater Victoria Public Library)

iv. Violating the privacy of others

Sample: Users must not violate the privacy of another user or library patron. (VPL)

v. Harassing or Disturbing Others

Sample 1: Users must not seek access into any unauthorized areas including "hacking" or harassing other users locally or remotely.

Sample 2: Responsible use of the internet at the library includes refraining from behaviour which disrupts other people. Library staff are authorized to ask you to stop using the Internet if you are disturbing others.

vi. Installing or altering software

Sample: Users must not install software or run any programs on the library's computer equipment that have not been installed by library staff. Users should not develop or use programs that infiltrate a computer or computer system and/or damage or alter the software components of a local or remote computer or computing system. (VPL)

vii. Using personal disks

Sample: The use of patron's own disks on the computers is prohibited unless first scanned for viruses by a library staff member. (Chetwynd Public Library)

viii. Downloading

ix. Damaging computer hardware

Sample: No alteration, damage or destruction of the library's computer hardware is permitted. (VPL)

x. Using multiple cards to exceed time limits

Sample 1: Users must have only one library card, use only their own library card and must not use other individual's cards or multiple library cards.

Sample 2: Access is available to those possessing a valid library card and password. Users must use their own card and may not use a card belonging to someone else, even with their permission. Library cardholders will be held responsible for any misuse of the workstations logged to their card. Accordingly, users must not permit others to use their card or learn their password. As a further protection from misuse by others, users must log out at the end of every session. (Greater Victoria Public Library)

xi. Identify theft, phishing or other fraud

Sample: Users must not seek information on, obtain copies of, or modify files, other data or passwords belonging to other users. Users should not represent themselves as another user.

xii. Games, Chat & Email

Some libraries prohibit or limit the use of public access terminals for games, chat or email.

Sample 1: If computer game use slows down system response time for other users, users may be asked to shut down the site. (Coquitlam Public Library)

Sample 2: <Name> Library does not provide e-mail accounts or allow access to multi-user games, Internet relay chat, video conferencing, talk utilities or other communications-based Internet services. (Cariboo Regional District Library)

xiii. Food & Drink

Sample: No food or drinks are allowed in the area of the public access terminals. (Coquitlam Public Library)

Box 5

A Note about Restrictions

As the above list shows, there are many possible restrictions a library may place on Internet use. While it is of course up to each individual library to determine what is appropriate for their situation, the Canadian Library Association recommends that libraries "offer Internet access with the fewest possible restrictions."

After describing the restrictions in place in your library, you may wish to include a statement describing the penalties that may result if customers do not comply with the library policy

Sample 1: Penalties, including denial of access, may apply where users do not comply with these policies. Upon written request of a parent or guardian, to the Director, the Library may deny access by a minor to a public workstation, for a limited period of time. (Coquitlam Public Library)

Sample 2: Users violating these conditions may receive a suspension or loss of the privilege to use these resources. Any illegal activity involving the library's internet resources will be subject to prosecution by the appropriate authorities. (Chetwynd Public Library)

Sample 3: Any person misusing or damaging the computer, or using the Internet for illegal purposes may have their library privileges suspended, be prosecuted and be financially liable for damage to equipment. (Creston Public Library)

6. Privacy

You may wish to include a statement on the patron's right to privacy

Sample 1:

Library patrons have the right to confidentiality and privacy in the use of electronic information networks to the extent possible given certain constraints such as proximity of other patrons and staff in public access settings. Please note, for legal reasons complaints from patrons that a user is accessing legally prohibited material may result in a library staff member intervening. (VPL)

The same confidentiality standards and procedures that apply to other library/public transactions will apply to the use of Internet resources. The library will make a best effort to not store any individual information on patron Internet use or other library electronic information sources except for cumulative, generic statistics used for assuring equitable access or to provide statistics for measuring service utilization and directing information subscription purchases. (VPL)

Library patrons have the right to equitable access to electronic information networks. (VPL)

Sample 2: All customers are expected to respect the privacy of others using public workstations. To protect your privacy and security, please log out of any programs by clicking the upper right corner of the program screen before leaving the workstation. (Surrey Public Library)

Box 6

More information on privacy

For a more thorough treatment of privacy in all areas of library service, please refer to PLSB's [Privacy Guidelines for British Columbia Libraries](#) (May 2006)

7. Review

The Internet use policy should be reviewed regularly. Include a statement about the frequency of review.

Sample: This Internet policy will be reviewed by the Library Board annually.

8. Revised

Indicate when the policy was last reviewed.

Publicizing Your Policy

In their [Statement on Internet Access](#), the Canadian Library Association encourages libraries to “publicize policies widely and post them prominently in library facilities and on electronic media.”

Additional Resources

Privacy Guidelines for British Columbia Public Libraries

Section 5: Internet / Computer Access

http://www.bcpl.gov.bc.ca/privacy/5_Internet.php

CLA Statement on Internet Access

www.cla.ca/about/internet.htm

CLA

“Net Safe; Net Smart. Managing & Communicating About the Internet in the Library”

www.cla.ca/netsafe/resources.htm

ALA

“Guidelines and Considerations for Developing a Public Library Internet Use Policy.”

www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/otherpolicies/guidelinesconsiderations.htm

Ontario Library and Information Technology Association (OLITA)

Internet Access Toolkit

<http://www.accessola.com/olita/site/showPage.cgi?page=toolkit/internet/index.html>

University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science

Survey of Internet Access Management in Public Libraries

lrc.lis.uiuc.edu/web/internet.pdf

BC Public Library Internet Use Policy Links

Library	Internet Use Policy Link
Alert Bay Public Library	http://www.island.net/~abplb/
Beaver Valley Public Library	http://bvpl.kics.bc.ca/services/index.php#1
Bowen Island Public Library	http://www.bowenlibrary.ca/services/internetworkstations.html
Burnaby Public Library	http://www.bpl.bc.ca/inetpoli.htm
Burns Lake Public Library	http://www.sandercott.com/burnslakelibrary/services.html
Caribou Regional District Library	http://www.cln.bc.ca/General%20Information/internet_policy.htm
Castlegar & District Public Library	http://www.castlegarlibrary.com/policy/policymanual.html#0.1_010000F5
Chetwynd Public Library	http://chetwyndpubliclibrary.com/phpnuke2/modules/MemberShip/Internet%20Acceptable%20Use.doc
Coquitlam Public Library	http://www.library.coquitlam.bc.ca/Using+Your+Library/Booking+a+Computer/internetaccess.htm
Cranbrook Public Library	http://www.cranbrookpubliclibrary.ca/init_libr.html
Creston Public Library	http://www.crestonlibrary.com/1337/36.html
Dawson Creek Municipal Public Library	http://www.dcpl.dawson-creek.bc.ca/cap.htm
Elkford Public Library	http://www3.telus.net/public/elklib1/home/internet_policies.htm
Fernie Public Library	Not Online
Fort Nelson Public Library	http://fortnelson.bclibrary.ca/about/internet-policy
Fort St. James Public Library	Not Online
Fort St. John Public Library	http://www.pris.bc.ca/library/library.html
Fraser Valley Regional Library	http://www.fvrl.bc.ca/lib_policies_internet.asp
Gibsons & District Public Library	http://www.gdpl.scrd.bc.ca/library/Aboutus.htm
Grand Forks & District Public Library	http://www.grandforkslibrary.com/computerservices.php
Granisle Public Library	Library does not have a website
Greater Victoria Public Library	http://www.gvpl.ca/files/PDF/Library_Board_Policies/Collecti ons_and_Services/internet_policy.pdf
Greenwood Public Library	http://www.sunshinecable.com/~greenlib/internet.html
Hazelton District Public Library	http://www.hazeltonlibrary.bc.ca/services.html
Houston Public Library	http://library.houston.ca/services.html#pac
Hudson's Hope Public Library	Not Online
Invermere Public Library	Not Online
Kaslo & District Public Library	Not Online
Kimberley Public Library	http://www.kimberleylibrary.net/faqs.html
Kitimat Public Library	http://www.kitimatpubliclibrary.org/#policies
Lillooet Area Public Library	http://lillooet.bclibrary.ca/about/policies/internet-policy
Mackenzie Public Library	http://www.mackbc.com/macklib/index.htm
McBride & District Public Library	http://mcbride.bclibrary.ca/about/policies
Midway Public Library	Not Online
Nakusp Public Library	http://www.nakusplibrary.bc.ca/ourservices.htm#ComputerAccess
Nelson Municipal Library	http://www.library.nelsonbc.net/publicputers.html
New Westminster Public Library	http://www.nwpl.ca/about/internetpolicy.htm
North Vancouver City Library	http://www.cnv.org/nvcl/server.aspx?c=1&i=17
North Vancouver District Public Library	http://www.nvdpl.ca/about/info/internet.htm
Okanagan Regional Library	http://www.orl.bc.ca/aboutus/policies.aspx
Pemberton & District Public Library	http://www.pembertonlibrary.bc.ca/about.html
Pender Island Public Library	http://www.cablelan.net/piplweb/policy.html

Penticton Public Library	Not Online
Port Moody Public Library	http://library.portmoody.ca/NR/rdonlyres/A3EE297E-01EC-4137-8CB2-8EF1BA7B7BEE/44771/PublicInternetAccess.htm
Pouce Coupe Public Library	Not Online
Powell River Public Library	http://www.powellriverlibrary.ca/Services/internet_use_policy.htm
Prince George Public Library	http://www.lib.pg.bc.ca/about/services#13
Prince Rupert Library	http://www.princerupertlibrary.ca/mod.php?mod=userpage&page_id=33&menu=120204#internetpolicy
Radium Hot Springs Public Library	Library does not have a website
Richmond Public Library	http://www.yourlibrary.ca/aboutus_sub.cfm?lev1=2&lev2=1
Rossland Public Library	http://rosslib.kics.bc.ca/info.html#computer
Salmo Public Library	http://salmovillage.ca/library/programs.php
Salt Spring Island Public Library	http://www.saltspringlibrary.com/info.html
Sechelt Public Library	http://www.secpl.scrd.bc.ca/serviceeventssechelt.html
Smithers Public Library	http://www.smitherslibrary.ca/internet.htm
Sparwood Public Library	http://www.elkvalley.net/sparwoodlibrary/
Squamish Public Library	http://www.squamishlibrary.bc.ca/library/services/internetpolicy.aspx
Stewart Public Library	http://stewartpubliclibrary.ca/info.htm
Surrey Public Library	http://www.spl.surrey.bc.ca/Utility/terms.htm
Terrace Public Library	http://www.terracelibrary.ca/information
Thompson-Nicola Regional District Library System	http://tnrd.fileprosite.com/contentengine/Link.asp?ID=1378
Trail & District Public Library	http://www.traillibrary.com/wrkstations.html
Tumbler Ridge Public Library	http://www.pris.bc.ca/tr-library/new/lip.htm
Valemount Public Library	http://www.library.valemount.com/policies.htm
Vancouver Island Regional Library	http://www.virl.bc.ca/main_content/services_at_your_library/internet_access.html#policy
Vancouver Public Library	http://www.vpl.ca/general/publicInternetPolicy.html
Vanderhoof Public Library	http://www.vanderhoofpubliclibrary.com/Internet-Usage-Policy.html
View Royal Public Library	http://members.shaw.ca/vivr.ill/services.htm#publicaccess
West Vancouver Memorial Library	http://www.westvanlib.ca/internet.htm
Whistler Public Library	http://www.whistlerlibrary.ca/pages/aboutlibrary/computeruse.shtml