



Resolution on protecting privacy and safety in coronavirus-related library policy

Whereas privacy is fundamental to library ethics and intellectual freedom;

Whereas collecting patron information to assist with contact tracing is inconsistent with the Library Bill of Rights section VII (ALA Policy B.2.1) which states "All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information";

Whereas the Code of Professional Ethics for Librarians specifies librarians "protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted" (ALA Policy B.1.2 #3);

Whereas further elaboration of these statements, provided in ALA's "Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights" (Revised 2019), and "Privacy and Confidentiality: Library Core Values" (Revised 2017), emphasize the critical role that privacy and confidentiality play in protecting intellectual freedom and the latter document affirms that "lack of privacy and confidentiality chills people's choices, thereby suppressing access to ideas. The possibility of surveillance, whether direct or through access to records of speech, research and exploration, undermines a democratic society.";

Whereas in relation specifically to contact tracing, the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom states in *Protecting Privacy in a Pandemic: a Resource Guide*: "Collection and sharing of information about library users for purposes other than the delivery of library resources, services, and programming — such as information collected for contact tracing — is inconsistent with that mission and may violate laws protecting user privacy if done without the full and informed consent of the library user. In all cases, access to, and delivery of, library resources and services should not be conditioned on the user's consent to the collection and use of their information for contact tracing or other purposes unrelated to library service"; and

Whereas libraries and their governing bodies should view all potential policies and procedures through the lens of equity, and recognize that data collection creates disproportionate barriers for members of marginalized communities, and could erode hard-earned community trust; now, therefore, be it:



Resolved, the American Library Association (ALA) on behalf of its members

1. encourages libraries to adopt policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic consistent with libraries' core values of intellectual freedom and privacy;
2. encourages libraries to work with public health officials to disseminate crucial information;
3. encourages libraries to modify services and practices to protect patrons and staff in the support of the work of first responders;
4. encourages libraries to protect our patrons and maintain the trust of our community by not collecting data for non-library purposes, including contact tracing;
5. directs the ALA Executive Board to issue further guidance to libraries in support of patron privacy as it relates to contact tracing.

Adopted by the Council of the American Library Association
Tuesday, June 23, 2020, ALA Virtual Council Meeting

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracie Hall", written in a cursive style.

Tracie D. Hall, Executive Director and
Secretary of the ALA Council



References:

ALA OIF: "[Protecting Privacy in a Pandemic: A Resource Guide](#)" - May 8, 2020