

School of Information Sciences – University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Securing our Public Libraries: A Forum on Privacy and Security

The School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is seeking a grant in the amount of \$149,999 from National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG-L) to support a National Forum on privacy and security, enabling experts to collaborate with public library representatives in an exploratory study to gather, learn, and discuss what technological mechanisms are currently in place to protect the nation's public library patrons' privacy. More specifically this project will seek to identify the existence and absence of privacy protecting technologies (software and/or hardware) in public library systems of all sizes, considering the differences in comparing smaller rural vs larger urban public library systems and what unique challenges they face. The results of this project will impact the capacity of library staff and patrons to access and engage with online content while protecting user privacy and library system integrity.

Statement of National Need: With over 9,000 public libraries in the US, the impact of public libraries is widespread (Rosa, 2019). American public libraries and the American Library Association (ALA) have a long-standing reputation of being on the forefront of protecting patrons' privacy dating back into the early 20th century when the ALA Code of Ethics was affirmed in 1939 (Gardner, 2002). Due to the digital revolution and changes in United States society, public libraries now play a critical role in offering free public internet access and have become a key source of news, social capital, and access to electronic government services and information for a significant proportion of the U.S. population (Jaeger & Fleischmann, 2007). Those who rely on these services include those who have no other means of access such as people who need help using computers and the internet and populations of low socioeconomic status who are entrusting their privacy to the library system. Federal, state, and local government agencies also rely on public libraries to provide guidance and access to government websites, forms, and services and direct citizens to their public library for help (Jaeger & Fleischmann, 2007). More recently, the ALA updated its interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights to include technological measures that can protect patron privacy but with such a wide variety of library sizes, funding, staff training, equipment, vendors, and software installed on library systems it is not clear if any technological measures are currently in place and widespread that can adhere to the ALA guidelines. In addition, there has been a lack of focus on the discussion of technological measures that need to be in public libraries in order to protect the privacy of the patrons using the facilities, and the integrity of the library systems themselves.

National Impact: While there have been valuable recent national forums that have explored library privacy such as examining the privacy violations in Web analytics and the library values in the digital space, we see an important gap in the conversations we are having about privacy and security technologies implemented in our public libraries in a broader sense. We also see a disconnect in the understanding and lack of shared vocabulary among the public library community and differing levels of technical skillsets and resources across the wide range of public library systems. These shortcomings prevent consistent attention to this issue across the profession and hinder those responsible for building and deploying privacy protecting technologies in our libraries' hardware and software. There needs to be a systematic study which includes key stakeholders to discuss the status of patron privacy in our public libraries and what existing technology may or may not be appropriate to employ or what new systems could be developed to help ensure the protection of patrons' privacy. However, before we can determine what technologies are needed it is essential that we have a national forum to focus on the adequacy of current practices and the extent to which they meet ALA guidelines.

Project Design: This project, classified under National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives, will draw on an advisory board with the inclusion of key stakeholders including Privacy Enhancing Tech (PET) experts, public library directors/staff representing libraries of varying sizes (to ensure that small rural libraries as well as

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large/sophisticated ones) , members of the Library Information Technology Association (LITA), Library Freedom Project leads, representatives from recent prior NLG-L national forum grants that have addressed library privacy, and members of the general public. This will allow for a meaningful discussion with the goal of developing a unified solution to address this problem. Our project will be modeled after two prior National Forum grant-awarded studies: “A National Forum on Web Privacy and Web Analytics: Action Handbook” and “Library Values & Privacy in our National Digital Strategies: Field Guides, Convenings, and Conversations” whose respective PI’s will join this project as collaborators to share information they have learned while helping to fill the gap still remaining in protecting patrons’ privacy.

Proposed Timeline:

- September 2020 – Grant begins and initial online brainstorm meetings with collaborators to plan for the first forum/meeting and to develop a strategy for identifying key stakeholders to be included in the discussions.
- October 2020 to January 2021 – Hold the first forum for key stakeholders to determine what is the best strategy for the evaluation of existing privacy protecting technologies in public libraries
- February 2021 - May 2021– Implement the proposed strategy for evaluation and plan for the second forum
- June 2021 – Hold Second Stakeholders’ meeting at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, present preliminary results from the evaluation and determine next steps
- August 2021 – Final report and release of a white paper that provides an overview of the discussion findings and state of privacy protecting technologies in public libraries and what is working and/or lacking.

Proposed Advisory and Collaborating Team:

- **PI -Masooda Bashir** is an Associate Professor in the School of Information Sciences at UIUC and focuses her research on information privacy and security.
- **Collaborators: Becky Yoose**, a Library Data Privacy Consultant with LDH Consulting Services; **Bonnie Tijerina**, a researcher at Data & Society; **Lisa Hinchliffe**, professor and coordinator of information literacy services at UIUC; **Scott Young** an Associate Professor and User Experience & Assessment Librarian at Montana State University; **Michael Zimmer**, a privacy and social media scholar at Marquette University.

Budget: The total amount requested from IMLS is \$149,999 with no cost sharing: Requesting 0.5 of one summer month salary including fringe for PI (\$8,088), funding for 25% of a project coordinator to coordinate conference events and travel, a graduate hourly to assist in planning the forum and conduct surveys. Including fringe (\$27,534), staff and participant travel to attend two sponsored events (\$79,200), conference expenses such as supplies, facility costs, meals and honoraria (\$6,358), and indirect costs (\$28,819).

References:

- Gardner, Carrie. "Fact or fiction: privacy in American libraries." *Proceedings of the 12th annual conference on Computers, freedom and privacy*. ACM, 2002.
- Jaeger, Paul T., and Kenneth R. Fleischmann. "Public libraries, values, trust, and e-government." *Information Technology and Libraries* 26.4 (2007): 34-43.
- Rosa, Kathy. "LibGuides: Number of Libraries in the United States." *American Library Association*, 14 June 2019, <https://libguides.ala.org/numberoflibraries>.