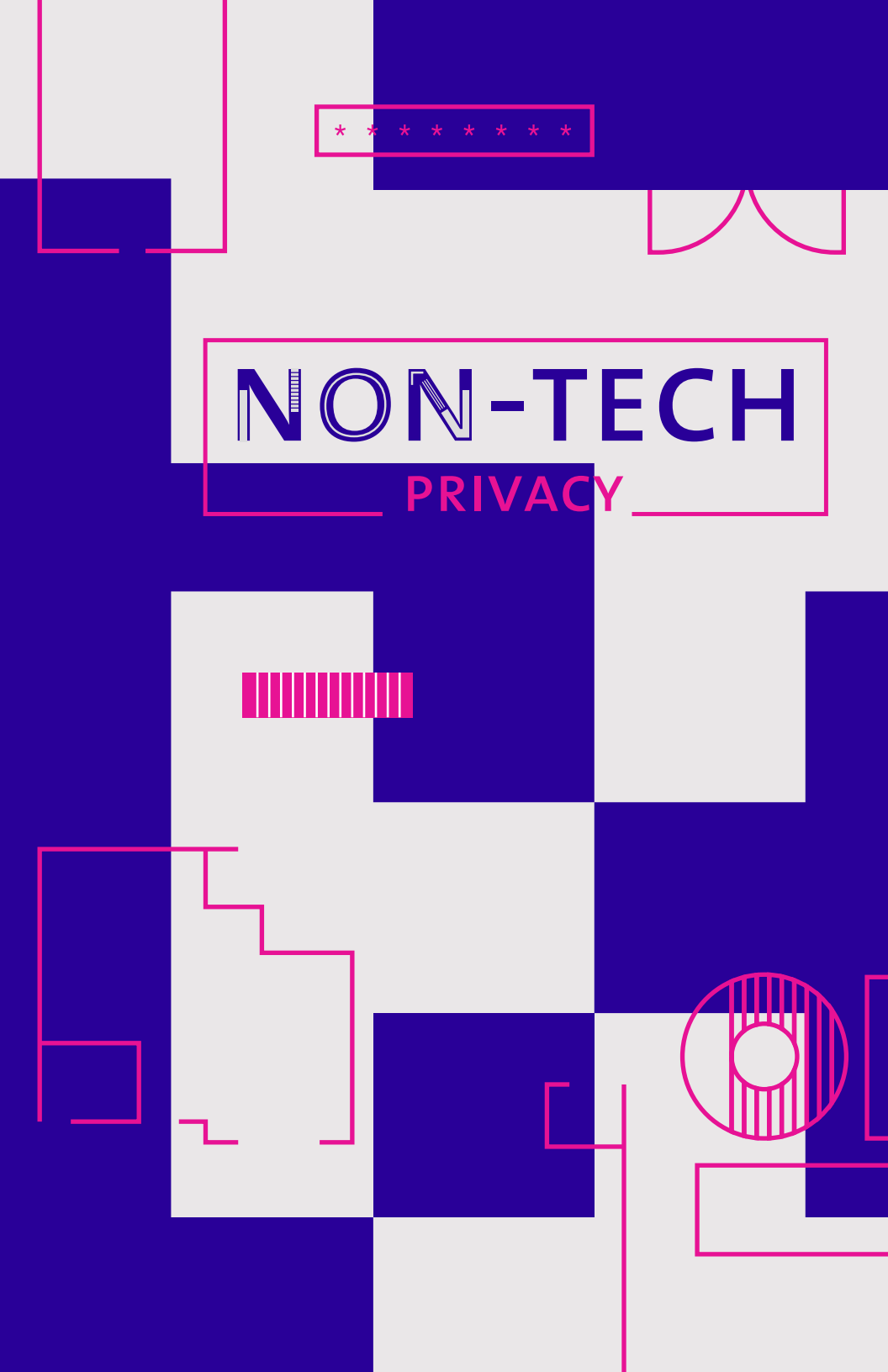
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NON-TECH
PRIVACY

Privacy is a fundamental right of library users. When most people think of privacy, they think of technology. However, threats to our privacy can come from both hi-tech and low/no-tech practices. This guide is meant to help you navigate some areas in your library that are often overlooked when thinking about privacy. You don't have to be a tech whiz or have access to your library's catalog, vendors, or information technology to enact healthy privacy practices. Use this guide to help your library protect users' privacy, even when they're not online.

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Creating Private Spaces

The design of a library space can hinder or enhance privacy. Most staff are locked into the physical space they have, but a lot can be done with furniture to make the library inviting and also give the maximum amount of privacy to your users. Everyone should have spaces where they can look at information without a passerby seeing what they're reading or typing.

Many users depend on the library for access to a computer. From students in school to the public in branches, our users deserve privacy when using a computer. Adults may be filling out sensitive documents that contain Social Security numbers or credit cards. Children may be seeking out information on personal health or gender identity. College students may be exploring deep research on topics that might seem dangerous or offensive to the casual passerby. It doesn't matter why a user accesses a library computer, we are responsible for upholding that user's right to privacy.

Creating private spaces can feel tricky when libraries also need to consider the safety of their users. Library workers often want to be able to see all corners of the library, especially where children and teens hang out. Situating furniture so that staff can surveil users denies them the right to privacy. Simple furniture moves can often allow for both privacy and safety.

If your library has the financial means, purchase privacy screens for all computer terminals and provide laptops for more private browsing. Having headphones available for use or purchase is another way to provide a more private experience.

EXERCISE

WALK AROUND YOUR LIBRARY.

Can you identify any spaces where there are opportunities to create more privacy? Consider setting up chairs so that a book cover would face the wall or so that a laptop screen could be hidden from people walking down an aisle.

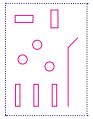
WHAT ABOUT YOUR COMPUTER SETUP?

Where are the computers located? Can someone use a computer without another person seeing their screen? If it's possible for you to move furniture, try arranging desks so that the screens are not facing out toward public spaces.

DOES YOUR LIBRARY HAVE PRIVACY SCREENS AVAILABLE FOR USERS?

Dig around your library to see if privacy screens are available and where they are located. If you have some available, how would users access them? Create signage or come up with a creative solution that lets users know they're available.

Use the space here to map out potential changes to your library's space.

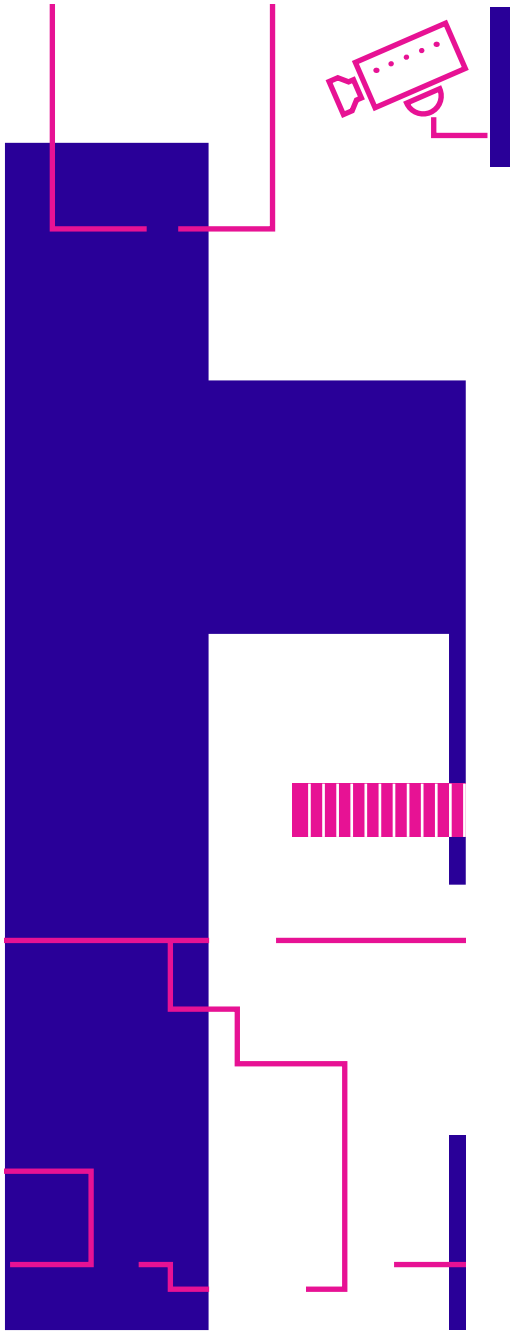


EXAMPLE

User Surveillance

How do you monitor users within your library? Many libraries have cameras to ensure the safety of both users and staff. While safety is always of the utmost importance, it can also lead to privacy violations. Cameras placed inside the library might be able to follow a user through the building, tracking their use and borrowing history. This footage could be viewed by library staff or requested by law enforcement. Everyone who enters a library should have the right to a private experience, free from an obtrusive eye in the sky.

If your library doesn't have cameras, you may still be violating the privacy of users by monitoring their behavior inside the building. Sometimes staff may have conscious or unconscious biases that lead them to follow certain types of people through a library space. Don't follow users around the library or peek at what is on their computer screens.



EXERCISE

Take a look at where your security cameras are pointing.

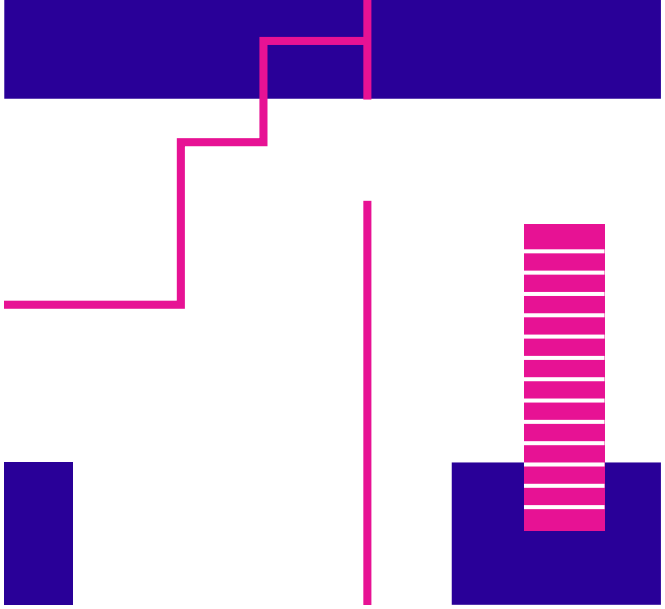
Can they follow someone through the building and keep tabs on what they access?

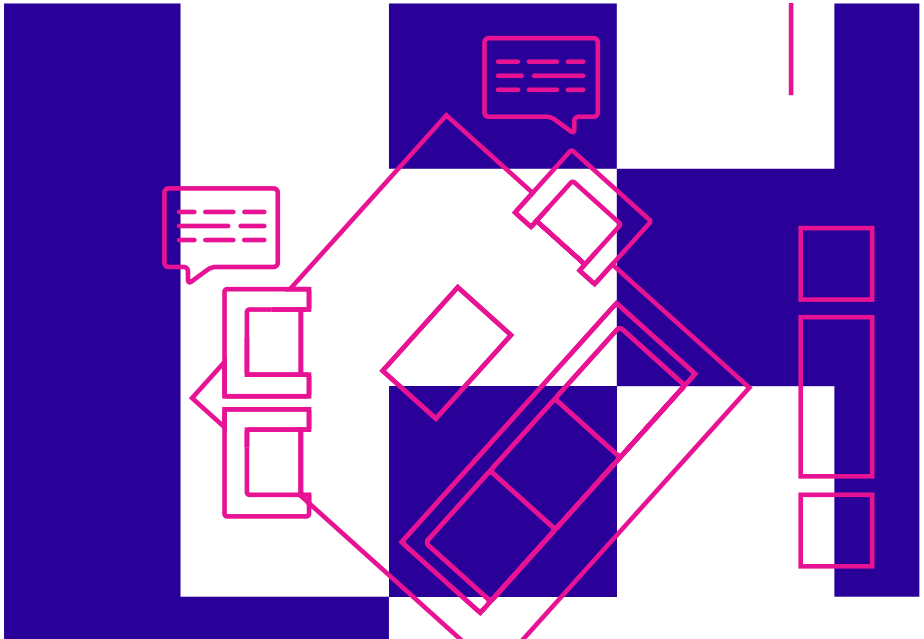
If possible, have security cameras only outside of the library.

Discussing Users

We all discuss library users with fellow staff. Sometimes it is necessary for security or for the academic enrichment of a user to share their name or other personal details. Many times staff just want to share an interesting interaction or express their frustrations after a long day. When discussing users, it's important to take a pause to decide if it's necessary to divulge who they are to another staff member.

Staff should never discuss one library user's behavior or library use with another user. If you live in a small town or serve a smaller library community, you might not even need to share someone's name for another person to figure out who you're talking about. Be vague with details that might expose someone without their consent. Also, always consider where you are before speaking. While it might seem at first glance that it is only you and a co-worker at the circulation desk, another user may be within earshot.





EXERCISE

It can feel uncomfortable to stop a colleague when they're violating someone's privacy by sharing their personal information in a conversation.

Write up three ways that you might approach a co-worker if you overhear them talking about a user.

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3. .....

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Overdue Items

Not returning an overdue book can be embarrassing for many users. For some, it means incurring punitive fines. Those fines can prevent them from coming to the library or graduating from college. While libraries will often delete the borrowing record of items returned, an overdue book may remain on your record for years. It is a ripe opportunity for a user's borrowing history to be shared without their consent.

Examples of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) include:

- Name
- Social Security number
- Birthdate
- Government issued ID number
- Financial account numbers
- Contact information (email, phone, address)

EXERCISE

RESEARCH HOW YOUR LIBRARY IS NOTIFYING AND DISCUSSING OVERDUE MATERIALS WITH USERS.

K-12 SCHOOLS: If notices are printed and placed in homeroom teachers' boxes, fold and staple the notice so that only the student's name is visible. If students are notified in person, move to a private location to have the conversation so that no one can hear what material the student checked out.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES: Does your library call users to inform them of overdue items? Develop procedures that require a user to verify their Personally Identifiable Information (PII) before staff disclose the title of the item. No information should be given to anyone other than the cardholder. This includes minors.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: How does your library handle requests from professors to recall items held by students? If necessary, develop a policy that allows the student's information to remain private. Professors and staff should not be given details as to who checked out the material.

Follow the Paper Trail

Libraries are palaces of paper. We hold vast quantities of information on the pages lining our shelves. We also hold vast quantities of users' Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in binders, desk drawers, and filing cabinets. A paper hunt in any library may turn up book requests spanning 30 years, volunteer forms from teens who now have teenagers of their own, library card applications, program sign-in logs, and pieces of scratch paper with user barcodes and search queries. Paper is still one of the most common ways that a user's privacy can be violated and their information shared without consent.

EXERCISE

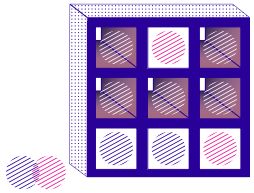
GO ON A PAPER SCAVENGER HUNT:

- Collect any piece of paper you can find that has PII.
- Write down the type of document you find, where it is located, what PII it contains, if it is in a secured location, and its retention policy.
- Use the three sections on the following pages to help in your assessment.

DOCUMENT TYPE	LOCATION	SECURED (Y/N)	PII	RETENTION POLICY

- Now shred any document that has passed its lifespan and secure any documents with user PII that you plan to keep.

INFORMATION COLLECTED



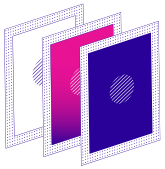
A library should only collect the information needed for business operations. No information should be collected because you think it might be needed one day. This is especially true for PII. Review all the pieces of PII you are collecting from users. Ask yourself, “Why am I collecting it?” Then ask yourself, “Could I still perform my task without this piece of information?” If the answer is yes, then you don’t need it! Take this opportunity to update your documents to collect the least amount of PII possible.

Library card applications often contain the most PII. Review what information you’re collecting and determine what you can remove. Your library shouldn’t need to collect identification numbers (detangle from student IDs if at all possible), gender, Social Security numbers, or exact birth dates.

STORAGE

Where did you find the document? Was it sitting on a desk or in a drawer where a user could access it? Was it stored in a binder in the office space where a volunteer, student worker, or unauthorized staff could take a quick peek? When people hand over their PII, they trust us to keep it safe. If you have documents that contain a user’s PII, it needs to be secured in a place where only authorized staff can access it. Find a desk drawer or office where sensitive information can be stored. Where possible, store information in a space secured with a lock unless it needs to be accessed.

RETENTION



In your search, did you find documents that have outlived their usefulness? If your library does not already have a retention policy, now is a great time to create it! Your governing body may already have one that you can look to for guidance. It’s rare that you will have a document containing a user’s PII that needs to be kept in perpetuity. Everything has a lifespan, and it’s important to regularly discard documents. Anything that contains users’ PII must be shredded. Have a shredding party! If your library is unable to acquire shredders, there are services across the country that can shred for you.

Anonymizing Holds

Most states have laws in place that require public libraries to keep a user's library use private. Both the American Library Association's (ALA) Code of Ethics and Library Bill of Rights insist that libraries respect and uphold a user's privacy in their use of the library. This means that we should not expose a user's reading, viewing, or listening habits to others. The number one way that libraries violate this is through on-the-shelf holds. There are many libraries that use full names and library card numbers to identify holds. Sometimes, that library card number is a piece of sensitive data like a Social Security number. That is far from best practice since it allows users to see what others are reading and also exposes users' PII.

Don't have any control over changing the holds slips? What else could you do to anonymize the process? Some libraries have opaque bags or paper slips that can go over books when they sit on the shelf.

CASE STUDY:
When you walk into a library in Aalborg, Denmark, you'll notice the holds shelves are free of receipts. How do users find their holds without the classic receipt tucked into the pages? Staff use an app to scan the barcode on the item and then the barcode of the shelf where it will be placed. This generates an automated message that is sent to users with the specific location of their item. Using this system eliminates any possibility of violating a user's privacy since there is no way of publicly displaying what items they have on hold.

EXERCISE

Go to your holds shelf and look at how they are labeled. What did you find?

If your holds slip includes a full name and library card number, what could you use instead?

Talk with your circulation department about alternatives.

CURRENT HOLDS INFORMATION

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SUGGESTED CHANGES

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Receipts

Even as we move further into the digital world, many users still love getting a physical receipt after checking out their materials. Parents hang them on the fridge to remember due dates. College students keep them tucked inside their course reserves. Sometimes the receipts get tossed into the trash, but often they are left behind inside a book for the next user to discover. Before computerized checkouts, it was common for someone to know who had checked out an item. All you had to do was look at the checkout card pasted on the inside cover. Integrated Library Systems (ILS) made us rethink this approach, but many receipts divulge a user's PII.

SAMPLE RECEIPT

```
Esteemed University Library

User name: Alex Parker

User ID: 35500648721

Title: Fahrenheit 452 / Bradbury Ray

Barcode: 6770899234567l

Due: 10-31-22

Total items: 1

10/01/22 08:30

www.esteemedu.edu
```


EXERCISE

Select a few items from your library and check them out.

Use the self-check machines and then try checking items out at the staff desk.

Try different types of materials like a course reserve or a popular DVD.

Take a look at what information is on the receipt. What do you find?

- Do your receipts include any PII?
- What information would be necessary on a privacy-focused receipt?

If your receipt contains information that may expose a library user, try to get it changed. This might take a little technical knowledge or calling vendors to update the process.

CURRENTLY ON YOUR RECEIPTS	WHAT YOU THINK SHOULD BE ON YOUR RECEIPTS

Self-Service Discovery

Your catalog is likely the primary way that users discover materials in the library, but it shouldn't be the only way. Many users may be hesitant to search for sensitive topics by using Online Public Access Catalogs (OPACs) or by asking a library worker directly for the material. Users should be able to access all the materials in your library without asking for it directly or even using one of your OPACs. If your library currently keeps titles behind the desk and only accessible by request, consider why and ask if this is necessary.

School libraries that organize and label their materials by reading or grade level risk forcing students to disclose their reading capability to their peers. Use standard, viewpoint-neutral labeling in the library. Work with administration to develop policies that address privacy and uphold students First Amendment Rights. https://bit.ly/LibraryLabel

TEENS HELP YOURSELF

LOOK FOR THESE NUMBERS ON THE SHELVES.
FOR MORE PRIVACY, USE THE SELF-CHECKOUT MACHINES.

Abuse/Incest	362.76 & 362.78
Abusive Relationships	362.8292 & 362.88
Acne/Skin Care	616.53 & 646.726
Aids/Hiv	616.9792
Alcohol	362.292
Anorexia	616.8526
Birth Control	363.9609 & 613.94
Body Changes/Puberty	612.661
Body Image	306.4613 & 616.852

Source: https://www.ala.org/yalsa/

EXERCISE

If appropriate for your type of library, create handouts on sensitive topics that can be discovered without staff interaction.

Walk through your library to determine all the ways a user can access the physical collection.

What barriers are the barriers to access? If someone can only find an item through a digital search or by speaking to a librarian, what could you do to allow for self-service?

ALA American Library Association

PRIVACY ADVOCACY GUIDES

Privacy is a core value of librarianship, yet it often feels like an overwhelming and onerous undertaking. Use these Privacy Field Guides to start addressing privacy issues at your library. Each guide provides hands-on exercises for libraries. Check out all the available guides at **bit.ly/PrivacyFieldGuides.**

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