

2012 Oregon Public Library Internet Survey Report

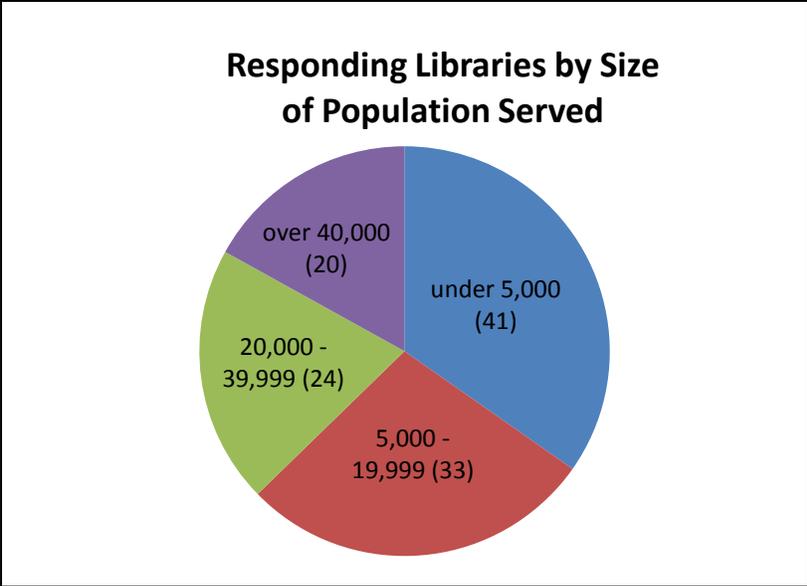
Every four years, the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Oregon Library Association conducts a survey about the use of the Internet in Oregon public libraries. The 2012 survey collected data about Internet policies, filtering practices, and patron access to social media and other types of sites. Similar surveys have been conducted in 1998, 2000, 2004 and 2008. These surveys have collected data across time about the responses of Oregon libraries to new Internet developments, such as the passage of CIPA and the growth of social media.

Results of the 2012 survey show that practices across Oregon libraries vary significantly about whether and how libraries filter the Internet, and at what age patrons can use the Internet without restriction. Trends towards less use of filtering and less monitoring of Internet use can be detected in a number of areas. Overall, survey results show that Oregon public libraries have stable, effective policies for regulating Internet use that are First Amendment-friendly, reflective of community values, and are generating little controversy.

METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY POPULATION

The survey was sent by email in December 2012 to the directors of all 133 public libraries and 7 volunteer libraries in Oregon, using contact information from the State Library's Oregon Library Directory. The online survey was designed in SurveyMonkey. The survey was shortened from the 2008 survey by 30%, with the number of questions reduced from 40 to 28, and the open-ended answers from the 2008 survey results were used to add additional multiple choice options, in an effort to reduce the time required to complete the survey. Follow-up telephone calls were made to non-responding libraries by members of the Intellectual Freedom Committee in an effort to increase participation.

In total, 118 library directors took the survey out of 140 who were contacted. This includes 114 out of 133 public libraries and 4 out of 7 volunteer libraries, with a total response rate of 84.3%. This response rate is lower than in prior years (91.4% in 2008; 95.6% in 2004; 93.8% in 2000; 98.4% in 1998). The lower response rate can perhaps be attributed to "survey fatigue" resulting from the proliferation of online surveys in recent years. This is the distribution of responses by the size of the population served by that library: 41 serve a population under 5,000 (34.7%); 33 serve a population between 5,000 and 19,999 (28); 24 serve a population between 20,000 and 39,999 (20.3%) and 20 serve a population over 40,000 (16.9%). 44 of these responding libraries (37.3%) are funded from a general fund; 27 (22.9%) by dedicated taxes – special district; 17 (14.4%) by dedicated taxes – service district; 4 (3.4%) by donations; and another 25 (21.2%) by or a combination of funding sources or some other method.



A caveat about the reliability of the survey data is required, especially when data from the 2012 survey is compared with earlier years. Because the 2012 survey received a somewhat lower response rate, the numbers of libraries responding to the same questions (for example, 9 CIPA-compliant libraries in 2012 vs. 18 in 2004) shouldn't be compared directly. Comparing percentages of responses is more reliable, although the assumption that the 84.3% of respondents to the 2012 survey is a representative sample has not been tested. For some questions, the wording and number of response choices was changed slightly from previous years to improve clarity and response rate. While the responses from the 2012 survey provide a reasonably reliable view of practices of the majority of Oregon public libraries for that year, and the comparison with previous years does show clear trends, the exact degree of those trends cannot be reported with precision.

INTERNET POLICIES

The great majority of libraries responded that they have a written Internet policy. 104 libraries (88.1%) have a written policy, while 9 libraries (7.6%) responded that they do not have a written policy, and 5 (4.2%) responded that they do not know. Of the 14 responding that they do not have a policy or didn't know if they have a policy, 5 reported that they have other policies in place which act as an umbrella to cover Internet use. These include the policies of their school district or library cooperative

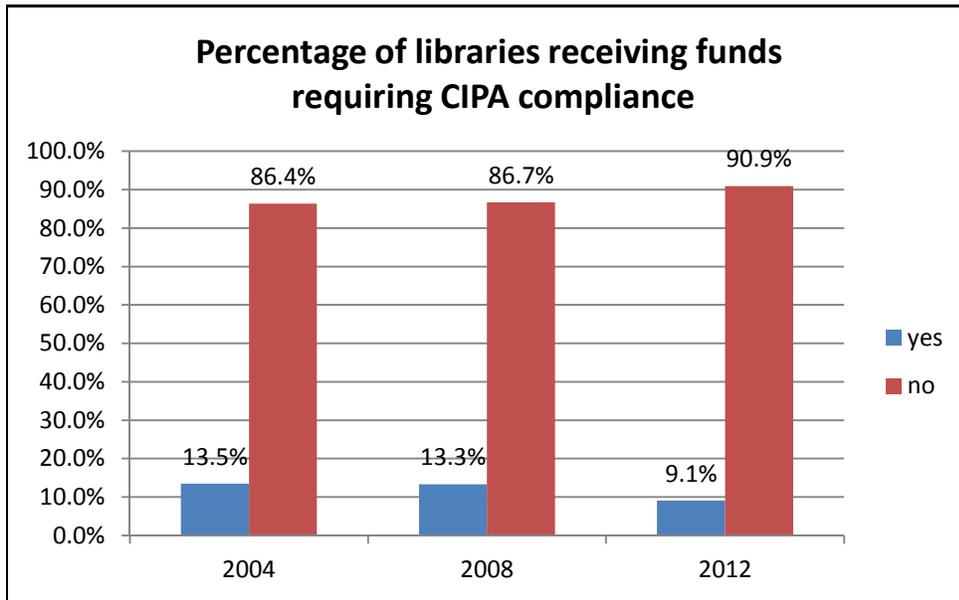
Libraries communicate their Internet policies in a variety of ways. 59 (50%) reported that their Internet policy is written and posted. 57 (48.3%) reported that users are required to agree to the policy electronically before accessing the Internet. 39 (33%) libraries reported posting their policy on the web site. Another 14 (11.9%) indicated that users are required to sign a printed form agreeing to the policy before accessing the Internet. Open-ended comments reported additional methods, including

- "informal contacts explaining why sites are (rarely) blocked"
- "this library does not condone pornography on the Internet' sign is posted"

- “Highlights of the policy are posted at each computer. Full policy available on request”.

CIPA COMPLIANCE

Libraries were asked if they receive any federal funds that require compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), such as LSTA for Internet Service and E-Rates for Internet. 99 libraries responded to this question with a Yes or No; an additional 12 responded “I don’t know” and 7 skipped the question. Of the 99 that provided a clear response, 9 (9.1 %) reported yes, their library does receive funds requiring CIPA compliance, and 90 (90.9%) reported they do not receive these funds.

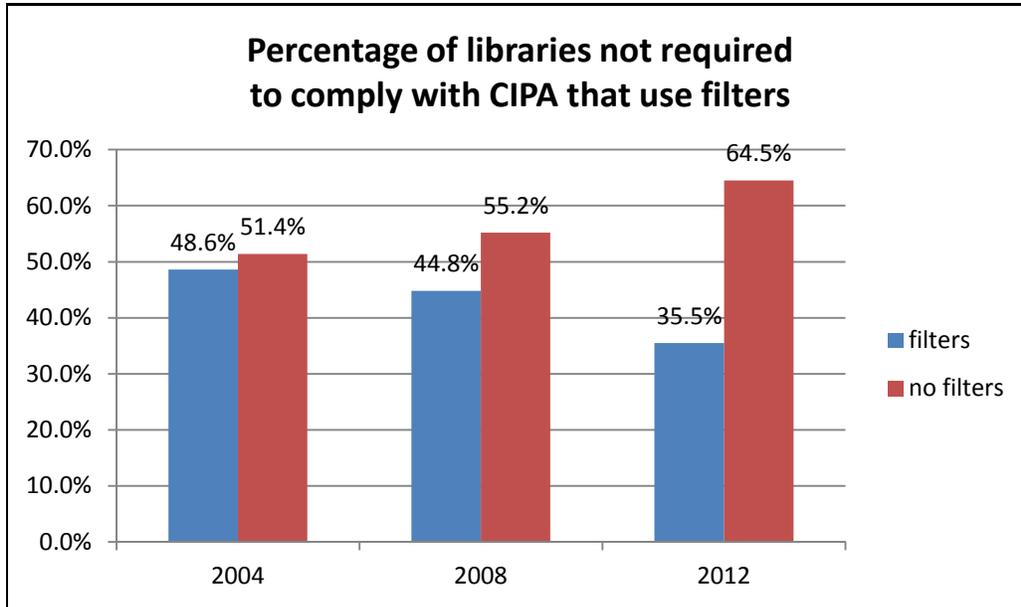


In comparison, in 2008 14 libraries (13.3%) responded yes to receiving funds requiring CIPA compliance and 91 (86.7%) no. In 2004, 18 libraries (13.5%) responded yes and 115 (86.4%) no. This reflects a slight trend towards fewer libraries receiving funds requiring CIPA compliance.

FILTERING

While the great majority of libraries are not required to use filters to comply with CIPA, 43 Oregon libraries reported that they do use filters. Out of 111 survey responders to this question, 67 libraries (60.4) do not use filters; 43 (38.7%) do use filters; and there was 1 “I don’t know” response. All of the 9 libraries that are required to be CIPA-compliant reported using filters. Of the 90 libraries which reported that they are not required to comply with CIPA, 32 use filters and 58 do not. Of the 12 libraries which reported not knowing if they were required to be CIPA-compliant, 2 use filters, 9 do not, and 1 responded “I don’t know” to this as well.

Overall, the percentage of libraries that are not required to comply with CIPA that do use filters has declined over time. In 2012, 32 of the reported 90 non-CIPA libraries use filters, or 35.5%. This is a decline from 2008 (44.8% or 48 libraries) and 2004 (48.6% or 56 libraries).



Because the 2012 survey included a lower percentage of responding libraries (84.3% in 2012 compared to 95.6% in 2004), the total number of libraries should not be compared, but the percentage decline does indicate a trend away from filtering.

Likewise, the overall percentage of all libraries using filters appears to be declining. In the 2012 survey, several questions included an answer choice “Our library does not use filters”, and with a small variation about 67 respondents out of 111 libraries chose this answer, indicating that about 60.4% of libraries do not use filters, and 39.6% do filter public computers to some degree. In contrast, in 2004 58.3% of libraries reported using at least some degree of filtering. Here is the trend of libraries using at least some degree of filtering:

- 1998: 18%
- 2000: 25%
- 2004: 55.6%
- 2008: 58.3%
- 2012: 39.6%

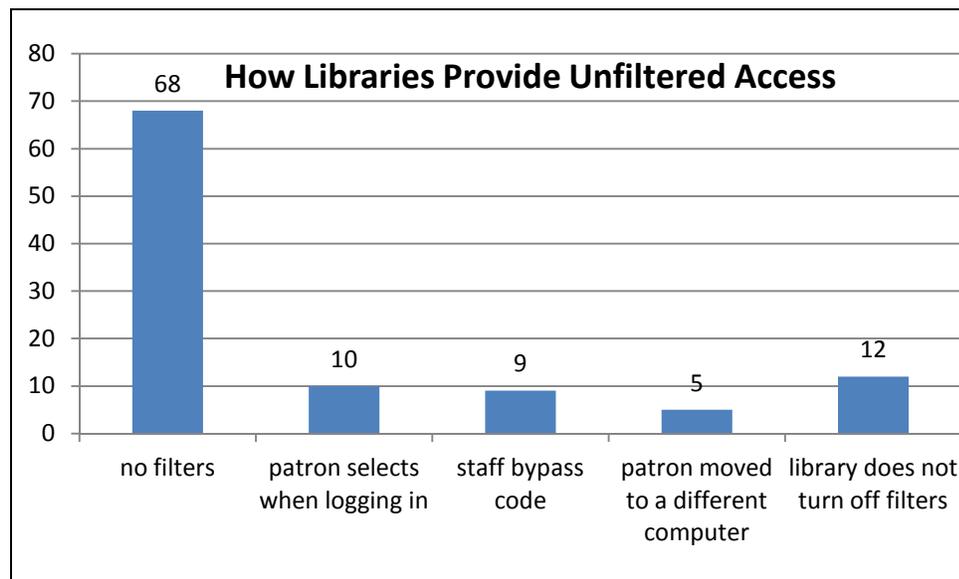
Again, it is not possible to make exact comparisons across time because of the different response rates and because questions were asked in somewhat different ways in different years. While precise comparisons are not possible, a trend away from filtering in Oregon libraries can be detected.

Filtering Software

Thirty-nine respondents answered the question regarding the filtering product used by their library. Of these, 13 (32%) were unaware of the name of the filtering software, with some respondents stating that it was provided through an educational service district or school, or through the IT department of the government entity (city or county), or through the library cooperative of which their library was a part. Four respondents reported using a product called M86, and four used CyberPatrol. The filtering products BSecure, CYBERSitter and OpenDNS were reported by two libraries each. Ten additional filtering products were listed by one library each. Two libraries reported that they placed blocks on file sharing sites and also place limits on bandwidth usage, but only one of these two libraries blocked specific content.

Turning off filters

Libraries were asked about their process for providing unfiltered access for patrons who request it. The majority of respondents do not use filters (68 out of 111 responses for this question, or 61.3%). Of the 43 libraries that use filters, the following methods were reported: 10 reported that “patron selects when logging in”; 9 use a “staff bypass”; 5 reported that “patron is moved to a different computer”. The open-ended answers listed a number of responses, several reiterating that adult computers are not filtered, so unfiltered access is provided by directing patrons to those computers. An additional 12 libraries reported “our library does not turn off filters.”



Taking a closer look at the 12 libraries which report that they do not turn off filters, 3 of these are combined school and public libraries, and 7 serve a population under 5,000. While 8 of these libraries filter all public computers, another 4 also have some unfiltered workstations. 5 of these libraries reported that a library manager has the discretion to unblock selected sites. Open-ended comments from these libraries provide a snapshot of practices:

- “All public patrons have access to most sites with the exception of pornography. We are combined and located in a Jr./Sr. High School. Students have restricted access during the school day and then public access after school. We use different logins during the day and evening for students.”
- “It is pretty simple for us as a public/school library. We are here out of the goodness of the hearts of our school board and they can take it away if they want because of trouble so people are just very grateful that we have a library.”
- “I lose computer users by having such tight filters on the terminals, especially adults. I don't have any control over it as the policy is set by the school board, not the library.”

Libraries reported who has the authority to turn off filters. The majority reported they have no filters to turn off (70 out of 111 libraries for this question, or 63%). Another 15 (13.5%) reported that the library manager has this authority. 10 (9%) reported that a library staff member has the authority, and another 10 reported that the patron can choose unfiltered access. The open-ended answers explained that many libraries have a combination of computers which are always filtered and unfiltered, so turning off filters is unnecessary. Several responded that their school district or library cooperative holds the authority. For one library, authority rests with “our volunteer computer guy.”

Libraries reported a variety of processes for addressing patron reports that sites have been blocked erroneously and should be unblocked. 12 libraries reported that “library staff reports the site to IT staff, who unblock the site.” 10 libraries reported that “library staff use a bypass code to unblock the site on a temporary basis.” 9 libraries reported that “the unblock request is sent to a library manager or committee which evaluates the request.” 8 libraries reported “no response - our library policy does not include unblocking sites.” 1 library indicated that “library staff reports the site to the vendor and requests that it be unblocked.” One open-ended answer responded that “I tell them we are a school library first and this is to protect our children.” Most open-ended responses communicated that this was not a significant issue:

- “It has not come up”
- “Never happened”
- “Staff would report this to a WCCLS committee. Has not happened at our library.”
- “Users are free to use the unfiltered machines. Also, it doesn't happen.”

INTERNET ACCESS BY AGE

Libraries were asked about whether they provide unfiltered Internet access to adults, teens (defined as approximately 13 – 17), and children (defined as approximately under age 13). For adults, 67 of the 112 responses (59.8%) reported that no filters are used. Of the remaining 45 libraries, 11 responded that “computers are always filtered for adults with no exceptions,” while another 11 responded that “computers are always unfiltered for adults.” 9 reported that “adults have a choice of filtered or unfiltered access when they logon.” 7 reported that “computers are filtered by default, but adults can request unfiltered access.” One library reported that “computers are unfiltered by default, but adults can request filtered access.” Open-ended comments included these answers:

- “Adults are free to use filtered or unfiltered machines as they choose.”
- “Computers are unfiltered but patrons accessing sites which might violate community moral standards are warned to not do so.”
- “If we see someone on an inappropriate site (porn) we walk over and tell them to get off.”
- “Filters are in effect for all users BUT the level of filtration is minimal.”

Of the 11 libraries which reported that their computers are always filtered for adults, the majority reported in other questions that there was some process in place for unblocking sites, although 5 of these did not. A number of the libraries without a process for unblocking sites are combined school and public libraries.

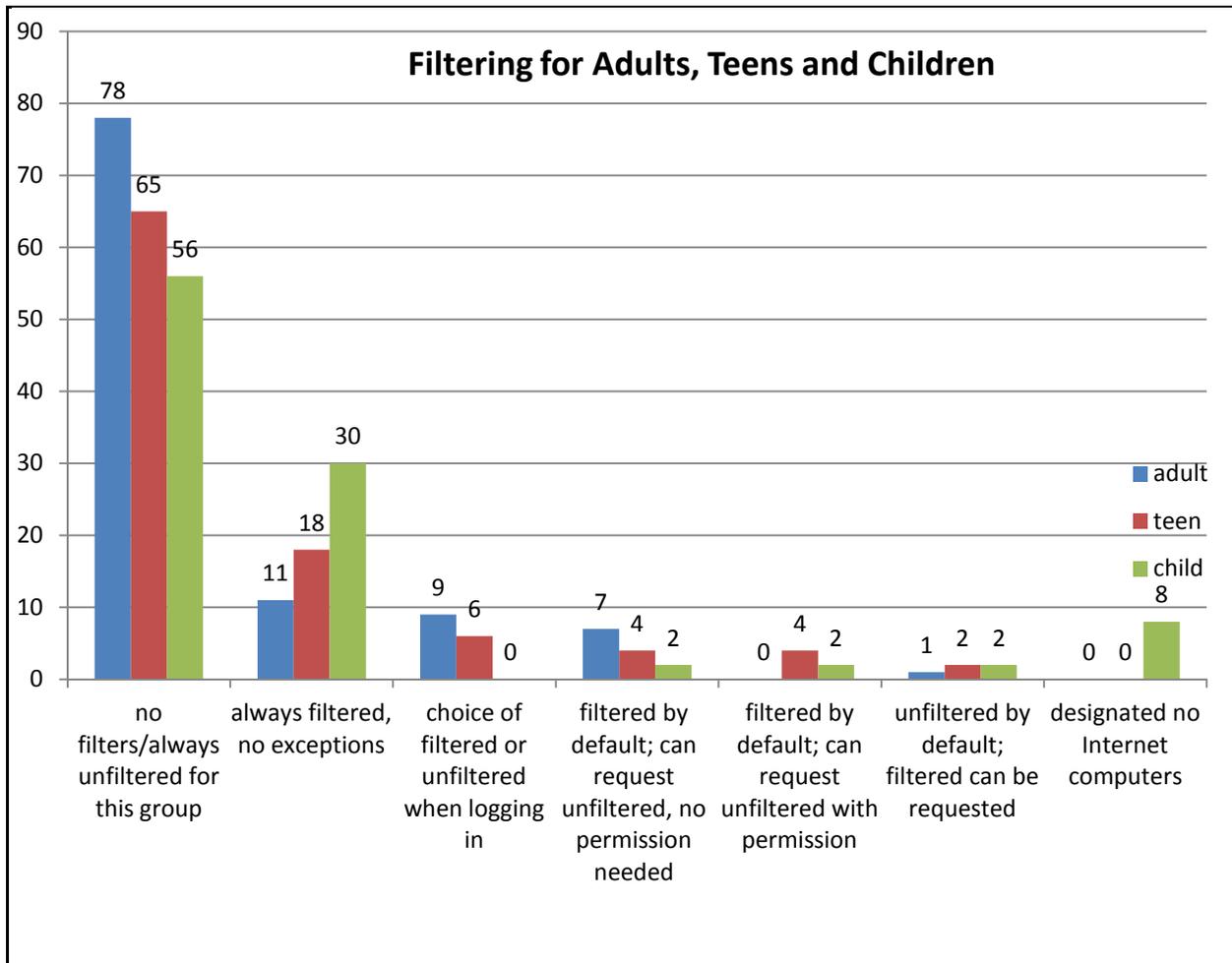
When asked about Internet access for teens, 65 of 112 responders reported that no filters are used at their library. For those libraries which use filters, 18 reported that “computers are always filtered for teens with no exception.” 6 reported that teens have a choice of filtered or unfiltered access when they log on. 4 reported that “computers are filtered by default, but teens can request unfiltered access with permission from a parent or guardian,” and another 4 reported that “computers are filtered by default, but teens can request unfiltered access and do not need the permission from a parent or guardian.” 2 reported that “computers are unfiltered by default, but a parent/guardian can request filtered access for their teen.” Open-ended comments provided details about how libraries serve teens, including the role of parents:

- “Teen computers are not filtered; if parent requested filtered access for their teen we would relocate them to a filtered computer.”
- “Teens are free to use filtered or unfiltered machines.”
- “We have no filters, but parents of minors must sign the child's library card application stating that they accept responsibility for supervising their child's use of the Internet.”
- “Computers for teens are not filtered. Parents with concerns about their child's access are invited to use the library with their teen.”

When asked about Internet access for children, 56 of 112 responses reported that no filters are used in their libraries. For those libraries which use filters, 30 reported that “computers are always filtered for children with no exception.” 8 libraries have designated children's computers that do not provide Internet access. 2 libraries reported that “computers are filtered by default, but children can request unfiltered access and do not need permission from a parent or guardian,” and another 2 libraries reported that “computers are filtered by default, but children can request unfiltered access with permission from a parent or guardian.” 2 reported that “computers are unfiltered by default, but a parent/guardian can request filtered access for their child.” No libraries reported offering children a choice of filtered or unfiltered access when they log on. Open-ended comments provided details about how libraries serve children:

- “Children's computers are filtered by default, but children can and do use the adult computers where they may choose filtered or unfiltered themselves.”
- “Parent or guardian must sit with child under 13 years of age when using the library internet computers.”

- “We offer offline computers for children, but parents are responsible for their children’s use of all library materials, print or electronic.”
- “If we see children on an inappropriate site of any kind, we tell them to change or get off.”
- "parental controls"



Age of access with and without permission

Libraries were asked at what age children and teens can use unfiltered Internet access with and without permission from a parent or guardian. For both questions, the majority responded that the question was not applicable because their library does not use filters. For the libraries that do use filters, 13 (25.5%) allow unfiltered access **with** parental permission at age 12 or 13; another 2 (3.9%) at age 14 or 15; 1 at age 16 (2%) and 2 (3.9%) at age 18. 16 libraries (31.4%) indicated that “computer access is always filtered, regardless of age.” 20 libraries provided open-ended comments describing their policies,

with several noting that parental permission is the key issue, not the age of the child. Several more indicated that children can use unfiltered adult computers without age restrictions, and that it is the parents' responsibility, not the library's, to monitor children's use of the Internet in these areas.

In response to the question as to what age children or teens could access unfiltered Internet **without** permission, 6 libraries indicated that the age was 12 or 13; 1 library selected age 14 or 15; 2 selected age 16; 3 selected age 17, and 15 selected age 18. Another 15 indicated that "computer access is always filtered, regardless of age." Open-ended answers again reflected a variety of practices:

- "Never, all children and teens must have parental permission to use the internet."
- "We don't require parental permission for internet use and children are not restricted from accessing the Internet in all areas of the library."
- "Since our filters have been known to block reliable sites i.e. our own website - anyone can ask to access a blocked site and we handle it on a case to case basis."

Managing varied levels of Internet access by age

Data were collected about how libraries manage providing varied levels of access based on age. The majority of libraries that responded to this question (61 or 54.4%) do not vary access based on age. For the remaining 51 libraries, 15 indicated that "patrons are strongly encouraged or required to use separate children/teen/adult areas, and access is varied by area." Another 7 reported that "computers are designated for use by children/teen/adults, access is varied by designation, and all the computers are in the same general area." 5 reported using "staff intervention (e.g. staff taps patron on the shoulder or patron use staff to filter/unfilter)." Another 5 reported that "patrons log on to computers with a library card that records their age, and their library card records the level of access they receive when they log on." Open-ended comments presented some of the nuances of how this is managed, including many indicating that parental permission was the key to determining access:

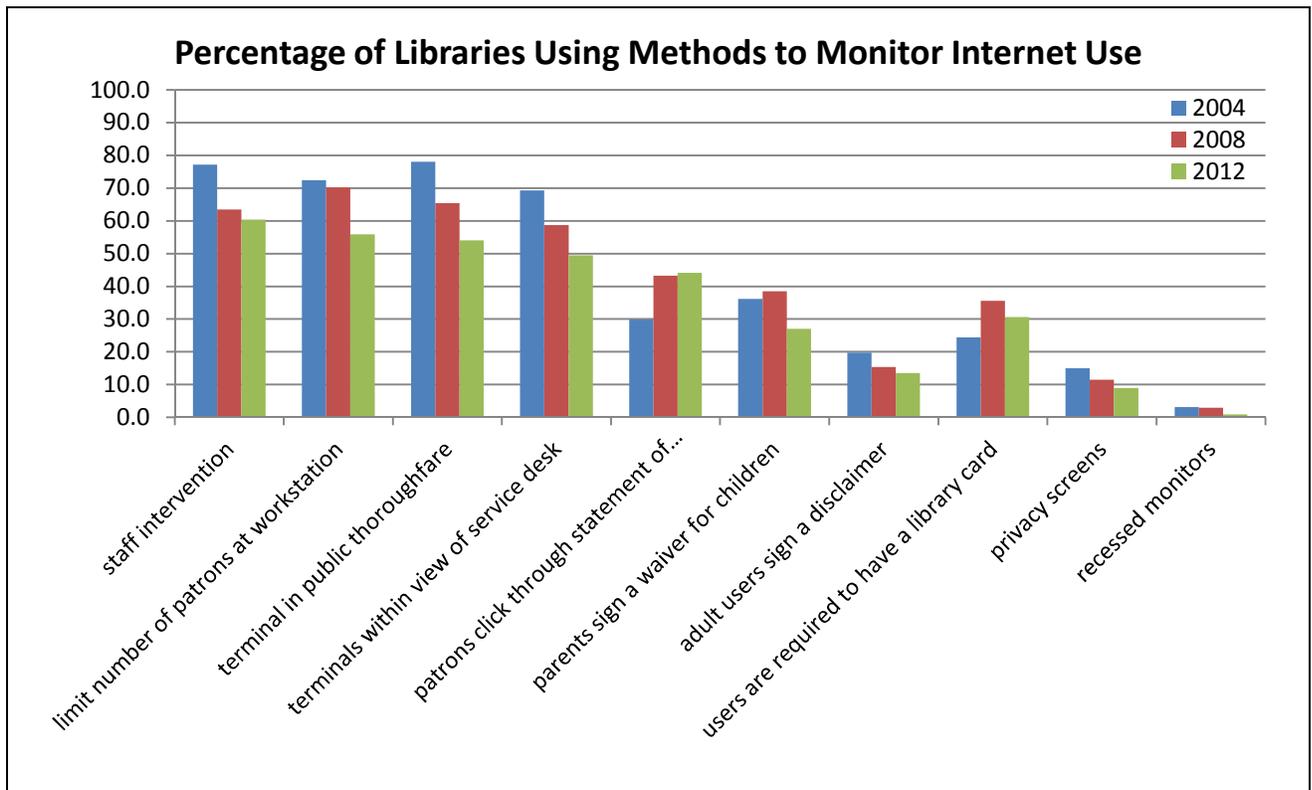
- "NO ACCESS is the default setting (Envisionware) and is changed to ADULT if patron is 18 or over, and PERMISSION if we receive written permission from parent or guardian for a minor."
- "All patrons have the same access regardless of age, but if we see them on an inappropriate site, we tell them to get off or leave."
- "All patrons have equal access with the one exception of ONE children's computer in the kids' room that does not have internet access at all. But we don't restrict children from the regular patron computers."

MONITORING INTERNET ACCESS

Library staff use a variety of methods to monitor Internet use by patrons. Comparing these methods between 2012 and previous years shows a decline in the use of many of these techniques. The method most frequently employed is staff intervention (a tap on the shoulder). In 2012, 67 libraries of 111 respondents (60.4%) monitored in this way, a decrease from 2008 (63.5%) and 2004 (77.2%). In 2012, 62 libraries of 111 (55.9%) limited the number of patrons at each work station, a significant decrease from 2008 (70.2%) and 2004 (72.4%). Other popular methods of monitoring Internet use in 2012 include setting up

terminals in a public thoroughfare (60 libraries or 54%) and arrangement of terminals so they are within view of a service desk (55 libraries or 49.5%). Again, these latter two methods are used less frequently than in 2008.

Many libraries ask patrons to acknowledge the library’s policy before using the Internet. This is accomplished in the following ways: asking patrons to click through a statement of responsibility (49 libraries of 111, 44.1%), asking parents to sign a waiver before children may access the Internet (30 libraries, 27%), and asking adult users to sign a disclaimer (15 libraries, 13.5%). In 2012 slightly more public libraries required users to have a library card before using the Internet. 34 libraries of 111 (30.6%) required a card compared with 31 libraries (24.4%) in 2004. The use of privacy screens and recessed monitors is less common. Only 10 libraries (9%) use privacy screens, down from 19 libraries (15%) in 2004, and only 1 library (0.9%) uses recessed monitors, down from 4 libraries (3.1%) in 2004. 15 libraries responded that they use other methods of monitoring, but most of the alternate procedures described were variations upon the categories above. At a couple of libraries, staff intervene only when other patrons complain.



SOCIAL MEDIA

In general, libraries imposed few restrictions on patrons’ use of social media, email and instant messaging in 2012. 94 libraries of the 111 that responded to this question (84.7%) indicated they do not place any restrictions on any social media sites, which is an increase

compared with data collected in 2008. In 2008 76.6% of libraries did not restrict access to any social media. In 2012 105 libraries of 111 (94.6%) allowed email access with no restrictions, and 98 libraries (88.3%) allowed games. Patrons were able to use chat without limitations at 81 of 111 libraries (73%) and instant messaging freely at 72 libraries (64.9%).

Respondents were queried about policies regarding use of social media sites, and their answers indicated use of sites such as Facebook and Twitter is not a significant concern. 98 of 111 libraries that responded (88.3%) did not have policies related to use of social media sites. Of the 12 libraries that have a policy, 1 prohibits the use of MySpace on children's computers, and at least 2 have a policy related to the use of Facebook. One director wrote that if the patron is under 18, a parent or guardian must sign a permission slip, and the patron must agree to refrain from online bullying. One respondent was not sure if his or her library had a policy on the use of social media.

ORGANIZED OPPOSITION

Only two libraries reported community opposition to their Internet policies in the past five years. One library reported that a parent wanted to limit her children's access to the Internet and wanted cameras to record Internet activity in the teen area. Another had "a member of the public challenge our lack of filters. There was activity in the letters to the editor section of the local newspaper. Ultimately, our Board decided not to filter but to install privacy filters and create a blacklist for patrons who habitually violate the computer policy."

In contrast, five libraries reported community opposition to filtering policies in the 2008 survey, and seven in 2004.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Open-ended comments provide a snapshot of some of the varied ways libraries manage Internet use, the majority with few difficulties. Here is a sample:

- "99.7% of the time, all is fine. There is an occasional porn (hard core-child porn) viewer and they are asked to stop; second time off for a month; 3rd time off permanently."
- "By using DeepFreeze, we don't have to worry about malware from any sites people visit (social media and game sites can be rife with malware). The only other issue we have had is sporadic complaints from our data transport provider that people are violating copyright/DRM laws by apparently downloading and watching movies and television shows without paying"
- "Kids tend to crowd around a game situation which can get noisy. If our library were bigger...."
- "When we had weblocker there were more complaints than ever, wastes staff time."
- "Requests for unfiltered access are extremely rare. Perhaps 2 times a month usually related to a specific site and usually by the same regular users. If a specific site is erroneously blocked, we can remove it from the blacklist."
- "All of our computers are visible to anyone walking by. If patrons notice anything inappropriate, they will tell us, and we'll look into it. We very rarely have problems"

SUMMARY

Overall, the results of the 2012 survey show that Oregon public libraries have stable, effective policies for regulating Internet use that are First Amendment-friendly, reflective of community values and are generating little controversy. Libraries have been providing Internet to the public for long enough to work out appropriate policies and practices to serve their communities. Survey data and open-ended comments both show that libraries have a wide range of practices surrounding Internet filtering and how patrons of different ages are served, and that these practices have been refined to the point that they seem to be operating smoothly in communities large and small across the state.

Comparing 2012 data with previous years reveals a slight trend towards less-restrictive practices. Compared with 2008 and 2004, fewer libraries are required to comply with CIPA, and a lower percentage of libraries are using Internet filters overall. Techniques of monitoring Internet use through practices such as staff intervention, limiting the number of patrons per workstation, placing computers in public view, and restricting access to social media sites are also declining. The message reflected in open-ended comments that problems are infrequent might explain why Internet monitoring has become less restrictive.

The 2012 survey was the first to add “I don’t know” as a category, and it is instructive to note how frequently this answer was used by library directors. For example, 12 directors reported that they did not know whether or not their library received federal funds requiring CIPA compliance. This is a reminder that small public and volunteer libraries in Oregon may find it challenging to navigate the complex legal, ethical and technological realities of providing public Internet access. The majority of responding libraries, however, seem to have evolved practices which manage these realities without much difficulty in 2012.

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