

Williamsburg Libraries Patron Privacy Policy

Privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, free thought, and free association. In libraries, the right to privacy is the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one's interest examined or scrutinized by others.

The Williamsburg Libraries follow the ALA Code of Ethics and Library Bill of Rights, acknowledging the paramount importance of library patron privacy:

"We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted."

"The American Library Association affirms that rights of privacy are necessary for intellectual freedom and are fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship."

Under the Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 78, Section 7 "That part of the records of a public library which reveals the identity and intellectual pursuits of a person using such library shall not be a public record..."

The Williamsburg Libraries strive to protect the privacy of library patrons to the fullest extent of the law.

The Williamsburg Libraries will retain only as much information as required to provide services whether these are provided in person, over the phone or electronically. Personal information on patrons will be discarded as soon as it is no longer needed. The library keeps no permanent record of internet sites visited, electronic databases used, or searches performed by patrons.

When visiting the Williamsburg Libraries or our website, or when using our electronic services, patrons can choose to provide their name, e-mail address, library card barcode, phone number or home address. This information will be used to only fulfill patrons' service needs and to help the library improve and target its services effectively. Our patrons should be aware that they are subject to the privacy policies of any other Web sites and organizations that they visit and use. The library is a member of the C/WMARS network (www.cwmars.org) which provides our library catalog, circulation system, and some electronic resources. Our circulation, borrower registration, and usage records are managed by C/WMARS and we observe their privacy policy (see www.cwmars.org/content/privacy-policy-0 for details.)

While we will endeavor to protect the privacy of patrons' use of library computers and borrowing practices, absolute privacy on public computers is not guaranteed. Please take note that library computers and collection stacks (containing books, magazines, and media) are located in public areas, which must be shared by all library users. In addition, the library cannot and does not guarantee that every task completed via its network is unconditionally private and secure.

No confidential information on library patrons will be revealed without presentation of a subpoena or search warrant. Some search warrants or subpoenas issued under the USA Patriot Act come with a “gag order” automatically attached, preventing staff from telling the patron or the public that information has been provided to the FBI.

The library does not sell, lease, or otherwise distribute or disclose patron name, email address, postal address, telephone number, or other personal information to outside parties.

Photographs may be taken at library events by members of the library staff or press. These photos may appear in local media or the library’s website or social media. Images will never be sold or given to third parties. Please alert library staff if you wish to be excluded from event photography. Alert library staff if your photo is used and you wish it to be removed. Individuals in photos will not be named without permission, or in the case of minors, without permission of a parent or guardian.