

Wireless Access Policy

Chances are that your library already has an **Internet (or computer) use policy**. If you don't—get one! (The State Library has many excellent resources.) That said, the question becomes do you need a separate policy for your wireless access? The answer to that question depends on how your existing use policy is worded. Does your policy simply give the standard disclaimer about the Internet being “an unregulated resource/medium” and patrons using it at their own risk, with perhaps some procedural information on time limits, signup, etc.? Does it look something like the example (**Figure 1** at the end of this document) from Louise's library? Most Internet use “policies” actually contain a **disclaimer section**, usually fairly standardized from library to library, and a **procedures section**, that details that library's particular way of handling access to their Internet stations, age limits for use, printing limitations and/or costs, and so forth.

If your wireless access is simply an extension of your wired local area network for patron use, you can assume that much of the same language from your Internet use policy will be appropriate for wireless. There are some things you may want to add, however. If your wireless network is completely separate from your staff network, you have saved yourself some security issues. However, your users still need to be told what risks they take using the service, what the acceptable use of this service is, and what it means to them to use it with their own equipment. Below is some sample language.

Examples:

- “The library cannot guarantee a secure connection at all times and in all places in the library, as many things can interfere with wireless including building elements, cordless phones, etc. The library takes no responsibility for lost data, etc. due to a lost connection.”
- “Wireless networks are transmitted via radio waves, and are therefore susceptible to potential ‘eavesdropping’, so patrons should be aware of what they are transmitting over this open network. In addition, patrons are responsible for maintaining up-to-date antivirus software, firewalls, etc.”
- “As the library's Internet access is filtered, so is the wireless access to the Internet.” Assuming this is the case. Equally, if you are not filtering wireless access, but you do filter your wired connections, they should be made aware of this difference, as well.
- “Patrons must take responsibility for their own equipment.” **This is a biggie that many libraries forget.** Some libraries include a legal disclaimer about not being responsible for lost items—usually this is copied from the library use policy, where it already exists.
- “All library policies concerning legal and acceptable use of computers and the Internet apply, as well as library conduct policies.” Again, your existing policies cover many of your concerns already. You simply need to apply them equally and fairly.

In addition, be sure patrons know what they can and cannot expect from this service, including:

- “The library does/does not provide the ability to access streaming audio or video, telnet or FTP.” These are not one service, but individual policy decisions you will need to make.
- “Web-based email only, no POP3 or SMTP connection.” This is for laptop users who have Outlook or Outlook Express on their machines. Chances are you do not have an email (SMTP) server attached, so they need to access their work or home email via a web-based interface. They should know how to get to this.
- “No printing is available from the wireless network. You can save your documents to floppy or USB drive and print them from our wired stations.” This is a common limitation, as wireless printing options are unwieldy at the moment (though this is changing). Be sure you let them know if they can or cannot
- “Staff will provide no/little/some technical support, including/not including dealing with patrons’ personal computer equipment.”

Many public libraries offer free, open wireless access, but assume no responsibility in configuring patrons’ equipment beyond simple hands-off troubleshooting (if even that). Some libraries choose to offer a minimum of assistance to patrons using their own laptops, but generally include language in their policy offsetting liability for such help. This is a tricky situation, and one you need to decide for your library, and your staff. Offering no help can make library staff feel helpless, but you don’t want to set up false expectations for patrons of technical knowledge of many different operating systems. Troubleshooting help sheets, both in paper and on the website, can give basic tips for configuring laptops to work in a wireless environment. This is often a good solution midway between “we don’t touch patron’s laptops or offer help” and expecting staff to configure patron equipment.

The book mentioned in the footer of this page has many examples of policies and troubleshooting or FAQ sheets you can use. We also recommend surfing around to other library websites who offer wireless access—their policies are often on their websites. Don’t reinvent the wheel! Find out what other libraries are doing, and pick what works for your situation.

Louise’s library, whose basic Internet policy is in Figure 1 at the end of this document also has an addition (**Figure 2** at the end of this document) to their policy, relating to using the wireless network. This section is within a larger FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) about their wireless access on their website at www.wdmlibrary.org. It encompasses many of the additions described above.

Finally, decide how you will make patrons aware of the policy. Will you simply post it around the building? Will you put it on your website? If you want them to agree to an acceptable use policy, you might look into a **captive portal** software product, which forces the user to a specific website when they first get on your network, where you can have them agree to (and hopefully read) a policy. An Internet or periodical search will get you more info on captive portals.

Checklist for Wireless Access Policy

This is a “Quick Look” checklist to make sure you’re covering your bases when it comes to wireless policy.

First, look at your existing Internet (or Computer) Use Policy. Do you need to add anything to it relating to use of the wireless? You may decide that it covers your situation. Do keep in mind the following possible additions, however:

- Network Security:** If you’re providing a fairly open network, a disclaimer about the possibility of radio signals (wireless) being intercepted. This is more specific to wireless than the equally useful disclaimers in your Internet policy about “library is not responsible for lost data due to network failure” and “beware of viruses” and “be careful about transmitting your personal information on an open network”.
- Network Availability:** WLANs can be flaky, patron laptops only more so. Note that they may lose signal at random, and the library takes no responsibility for lost data, etc.
- Limitations on Use:** time limits, bandwidth limits, no FTP, no telnet, no streaming content. Do you offer printing? Web-based email only (no SMTP server)?
- Personal Equipment Security:** warn patrons that the library is not responsible for stolen equipment, lost data due to their equipment failure, etc.
- Filtering:** note if the wireless access is filtered, especially if the in-house is not, or is only partially filtered (filter by patron choice only, for instance). You may want to quote any law (CIPA) relating to this, in brief.
- Support:** will your library staff provide help with patron laptops? Can they provide help with determining if there is a signal present (i.e. if the AP’s are working)? If you don’t want staff touching patron laptops due to liability, say so.

Getting it done:

- Staff:** make sure your staff are kept “in the loop” about any wireless initiatives, in particular about what they’ll be expected to offer in the way of support for patrons. This sounds silly, but wireless initiatives can happen so quickly that staff may not have time to become aware of all the issues involved, especially what patrons will ask them.
- Promotion:** How will you notify users of policy? Do they have to sign off on it before they can use your system? Will you print it out and post it? Put it on your website? Use a captive portal or similar product to force users to agree to the policy?
- Policy Approval:** any policy should be run by your board or advising committee, and preferably your university or city attorney, to be sure the language is appropriate both for liability and also in line with your existing policies.

Figure 1 – WDM PL Computer and Internet Use Policy.

January 25, 2008 Online Service Desk Minutes and Agendas Contact Directory Search Our Site Employment WDM Home

Department Home
SEARCH OUR CATALOG
Programs
KIDS ZONE
KIDS LINKS
Reference Links
Calendar
Friends Foundation
Biographies
F.A.Q.
Online Service Desk
Links

at your SERVICE
Mayor/Council/Atty. ?
City Manager ?
Admin. Services ?
Comm Dev/Building ?
EMS ?
Fire ?
Human Resources ?
Human Services ?
Info. Services ?
Library ?
Parks & Rec. ?
Police ?
Public Works ?
Water Works ?

Web Applications by Spindustry Systems

Library

Question:
Computer/Internet Station Use

Answer:
West Des Moines Public Library: Public Computer Station Use Policy

The West Des Moines Public Library currently provides a number of networked computers for use by patrons in the library for Internet browsing, word processing and other productivity activities. There are certain policies and guidelines related to their use.

This is the "disclaimer" section

The Internet is an unregulated global information resource. The West Des Moines Public Library cannot guarantee the accuracy and/or authenticity of information discovered through this resource. Patrons who find information or subject matter that is erroneous, out-of-date, illegal, offensive, and/or controversial should contact the original producer or distributor of that work directly.

Library users of the Internet should be aware of the following:

- Only parents and legal guardians have the right -- and the responsibility -- to monitor and control their own minor children's access to the Internet and to information obtained from the Internet.
- The West Des Moines Public Library cannot guarantee confidentiality over the Internet. Patrons entering personal information (credit card numbers, social security numbers, etc.) do so at their own risk.
- The West Des Moines Public Library complies with the United States Copyright Law, and all other federal, state and local laws relating to the use of the Internet and other electronic media.
- The West Des Moines Public Library is not responsible for work or information lost due to computer or system malfunction.

Rules and Guidelines for Public Computer Station Use

- Stations are available on a **walk-in basis** (see exception below). **Time limit on these stations is ONE HOUR** if another person is waiting.
- Patrons wanting to use the computer stations must **sign-in** when they sit down at a free station. Patrons may not misuse the sign-in process to gain additional periods of usage.
- One Internet browsing station in the Reference can be reserved by telephone for that **same day only**. If no one is scheduled, the station will also be available for walk-in use. You must arrive within 10 minutes of your scheduled time to keep the reservation.
- No more than 2 people may use a computer station at once, except for adults with small children. *Children in second grade and younger must be accompanied by an adult.*
- Patrons are expected to be knowledgeable in basic computer operations. Library staff do not offer individualized instruction.
- You may download information to your own IBM-formatted disks (be aware of viruses!).
- **Printing** of information is allowed, currently for **10 cents per page**. To reduce cost, be sure you only print out what you need.
- Regulation of the Public Computer Stations is at the discretion of the library staff.

This is the "procedures" section.

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Adapted with permission from: *Wireless Networking: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians* by Louise Alcorn and Maryellen Mott Allen. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2006.

Figure 2 – Addition to Internet Policy Relating to Wireless (WDM PL)

Wireless Access at the West Des Moines Public Library

The WDM Public Library is pleased to provide **wireless ("Wi-Fi") access** for our patrons to our Internet service.

If you bring your own laptop computer in to the library and wish to use the Internet connection, you must have the following:

- Wireless network interface card (802.11a/b/g or compatible)
- Ability to configure laptop to use the library's connection
- Charged battery (many electrical outlets are available, but not in every seating area)
- Audio users must bring headphones. [Library conduct rules](#) still apply to laptop users.

Policy and Procedures:

It's useful to refer to your other, related policies with a hyperlink.

Don't forget to mention theft liability.

Library staff members will not assist customers with their computer or their configuration. Library staff cannot accept the liability of handling non-library equipment.

The library does not assume responsibility for any damage, theft, alterations, interference or loss of any kind to a user's equipment, software, data files or other personal property brought into or used at the library's facilities.

All virus and security protection is the responsibility of the user. Our Internet connection is open and unfiltered. Be aware that as wireless access is sent over radio signals, 'eavesdropping' by other users, though unlikely, is possible. Keep this in mind as you choose whether to transmit confidential data.

The library cannot guarantee that this service will be available at any specific time or at any specific speed, nor can the library accept reservations for wireless access.

The connection shall not be used for illegal or time- or bandwidth-consuming commercial purposes. Users are asked to sign off the network when they're done, so that IP address can be freed up for other patrons.

Printing is not available through the wireless access. Users who want to print will need to save to a diskette or removable (USB) drive and use a public workstation to print.

All other applicable rules from the [WDMPL Internet Use Policy](#) will apply.

Additions to computer use policy relating to Wireless Access.

How do I use wireless at the library?

You will need to bring your own laptop computer with a WIFI network card to the library. The library access points transmit on the Wi-Fi standard IEEE 802.11a/b/g. Any standard device capable of accessing on this standard should be able to connect.

Will I need any special settings or passwords to connect?

The library's wireless Internet access is open to all visitors. No password is required. If your laptop is **configured to obtain an IP address automatically (via DHCP)** you should be able to connect immediately. If your computer does not connect, use the suggestions below under [Wireless Card Settings](#). Because each person's laptop is different you will be responsible for knowing how to configure your own equipment.

Where can I connect my laptop?

The Wi-Fi signal will work most places in the building, depending on interference. Some areas are better than others. Feel free to ask staff about strong signal locations. **Electrical outlets** are readily available throughout the building.

In this case, the policy is mentioned as part of a larger FAQ on using wireless at the library.