

Law Enforcement Inquiries Guideline

Mission Statement

The Library supports the efforts of our country to preserve and protect the security of our nation. The Library, however, recognizes its position of special trust with members of the public. As the choice of books and other library materials, along with the use of the information resources of the Library is essentially a private endeavor on the part of each individual patron, the Library has the responsibility of protecting the rights and privacy of our patrons in accordance with NYS Law 4509.

Civil Practice Laws and Rules Section 4509 Library Records, (signed into law June 13, 1988) states "Library records, which contain names of other personally identifying details regarding the users of public, free association, school, college and university libraries and library systems of this state, **including but not limited to records related to the circulation of library materials, computer database searches, interlibrary loan transactions, reference queries, requests for photocopies of library materials, title reserve requests, or the use of audio-visual materials, films of records**, shall be confidential and shall not be disclosed except that such records may be disclosed to the extent necessary for the proper operation of such library and shall be disclosed upon request or consent of the user of pursuant to subpoena, court order or where otherwise required by statute".

The Library Director has been designated as the person responsible for handling law enforcement requests. **All library staff should understand that it is lawful to refer the agent or officer to an administrator in charge of the library, and that they do not need to respond immediately to any request.** A staff member should try first to call the Librarian in charge or the president of the Board of Trustees.

SECTION "A": DURING A VISIT:

1. If anyone approaches a staff member alleging to be a law enforcement official requesting information, **DO NOT DISCLOSE ANY INFORMATION.**
2. Ask for identification and then immediately refer the agent or officer to the Library Director or other designated staff. Photocopy identification or take business card.
3. Director or other officer will meet with the agent with the library counsel or another colleague in attendance.
4. Ask to see the court order(s) (for example, search warrant, subpoena, National Security Letter) authorizing law enforcement.
5. **If the agent or officer does not have a court order** compelling the production of records, the director or officer should explain the library's confidentiality policy and/or the state's confidentiality law (NYS 4509) and inform the agent or officer that users' records are not available except when a proper court order in good

form has been presented to the library.

6. If there is no court order presented the FBI and/or local law enforcement has no authority to compel cooperation with an investigation or require answers to questions (other than the name and address of the person speaking to him/her). If the agent or officer makes an appeal to patriotism, the Director will explain that, as good citizens, the library staff will not respond to informal requests for confidential information, in conformity with professional ethics, First Amendment freedoms and state law.

7. If the agent or officer does present a court order the Director should immediately refer the court order to the library's legal counsel for review.

SECTION "B": IF THE COURT ORDER IS IN THE FORM OF A SUBPOENA:

- Counsel will examine the subpoena for any legal defect including the manner in which it was served on the library, the breadth of its request, its form, or an insufficient showing of good cause made to a court. If a defect exists, counsel will advise on the best method to resist the subpoena.
- Through legal counsel the Director will insist that any defect be cured before records are released and that the subpoena is strictly limited to require release of specifically identified records or documents.
- The Attorney or Director will require that the agent, officer, or party requesting the information submit a new subpoena in good form and without defects.
- The Attorney and Director will review the information that may be produced in response to the subpoena before releasing the information. They will follow the subpoena strictly and will not provide any information that is not specifically requested in it.
- If disclosure is required the Library's Attorney will draft a request to the court to enter a protective order keeping the information confidential and limiting its use to the particular case. The document will ask that access be restricted to those persons working directly on the case.

SECTION "C": IF THE COURT ORDER IS IN THE FORM OF A SEARCH WARRANT:

- Search warrants are executable immediately. However, ask to have library counsel present before the search begins to allow counsel to examine the warrant and assure that the search conforms to the terms of the warrant. This request may not be granted.
- Gather records identified in the warrant and present them rather than allowing non-library personnel to go through the Library's databases or records.

SECTION “D”: IF THE COURT ORDER IS A SEARCH WARRANT ISSUED UNDER THE FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SURVEILLANCE ACT (FISA) (USAPATRIOT ACT amendment):

- The recommendations for a regular search warrant still apply. However, a search warrant issued by a FISA court also contains a “gag order.” That means that no person or institution served with the warrant can disclose that the warrant has been served or that records have been produced pursuant to the warrant.
- The library and its staff must comply with this order. No information can be disclosed to any other party, including the Director if not present at the time the warrant is served and the patron whose records are the subject of the search warrant.
- The gag order does not change a library’s right to legal representation during the search. The library can still seek legal advice concerning the warrant and request that the library’s legal counsel be present during the actual search and execution of the warrant.

SECTION “E”: IF THE COURT ORDER IS A NATIONAL SECURITY LETTER:

The procedure is the same as for a search warrant. However, a gag order applies. The Director will contact Library counsel. If the Director is not available, contact the Assistant Director or Librarian in charge. S/he may request that the Library’s legal counsel be present during the search and that the search be delayed until counsel examines the court document. If law enforcement chooses to proceed, the Library must comply.

The Board recognizes that it is only through continued public confidence in the fact that these guidelines are being upheld that the public can maintain its confidence in the public library.

ALA Privacy Toolkit

The American Library Association (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) provides additional information about privacy, confidentiality and related issues on the Privacy Toolkit web page which can be viewed at:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/iftoolkits/toolkitsprivacy/Default4517.htm>