



To:                   Toronto Public Library Board – September 23, 2002  
From:                City Librarian  
Subject:             **Internet Service at Toronto Public Library**

Purpose:

To provide the Toronto Public Library Board with the results of a review of the Library's current policies and practices for Internet services and to recommend changes where appropriate.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications arising from the recommended changes to the Internet Use policy. Automated PC booking has been previously reported to the Board and is accommodated within the approved capital budget.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board:

- (1)    approve changes to the Internet Use Policy;
- (2)    receive for information the new initiatives in public training, staff training, and automated computer booking outlined in the *Internet Service at Toronto Public Library* report; and
- (3)    forward this report to Toronto City Council for information.

Background:

At its May 13, 2002 meeting, the Toronto Public Library Board received a report on the Library's Internet services, requested staff to review current policies and practices to determine if any further improvements could be made, and requested that staff report to the Board at a later date.

Comments:

The May 13, 2002 report on the Library's Internet services was developed in response to a Council motion concerned with the potential that children might be exposed to harmful materials on the Internet in the Library and asking the Library to review its practices in this area. The report reviewed our current practices which can be summarized as follows:

- developing an Internet Use policy approved by the Board and posting the policy online and in Library branches;
- developing consistent booking guidelines for Internet computers to facilitate equity of access for customers;
- providing training to staff on managing Internet services;
- restricting the use of e-mail and chat to specific workstations;
- purging cache files (material stored on the hard drive during Internet sessions) on a daily basis;
- installing filtering software on children's workstations;
- developing *Kids' Space*, a children's web portal, which guides children to age appropriate web sites;
- providing training sessions, *Families on the Net*, on Internet safety for children and their families; and
- arranging workstations to separate children's and adult areas where space permits.

As the report concluded, the Library is currently providing Internet services in a responsible and balanced manner, and has been diligent in developing training and content which recognizes the particular importance of helping children use this important information resource appropriately. In order to ensure that this approach is continued, the report recommended identifying any possible improvements in the following areas:

- Internet Use Policy;
- technological developments;
- public training; and
- staff training.

It was also recommended that the Library update the legal opinion on Internet service obtained during the development of the Library's Internet services in 1999.

### **Update the Library's Legal Opinion:**

The City of Toronto's Legal Department was requested to provide an update on the legal opinion from Mr. Ron Kanter. The updated legal opinion confirms the conclusions reached by Mr. Kanter, especially with regard to the filtering of all Library workstations. Specifically, it states that the filtering of all Internet workstations would likely be a breach of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The updated opinion concludes that the measures implemented by the Library "represent a reasonable balance between the desire to protect children from harmful or offensive materials and the need not to limit freedom of expression as required by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms".

### **Internet Use Policy:**

The Board originally approved the Internet Use policy in 1998, with revisions approved in 1999. The policy was again reviewed for this report, and the policies of other public libraries across Canada were consulted as part of this process. It is recommended that the policy be amended to:

- include the Library's mission statement which was developed subsequent to the last revision of the policy;
- add language to make it clear that the Library is not responsible for the security or privacy of online transactions; and
- add language that indicates that the staff are clearly authorized to take action under the Rules of Conduct if any use of the Internet workstations is not suitable for a public environment.

None of these changes affect the intent of the Policy but are intended to add a more specific reference to the Library's existing Rules of Conduct and clarify the ability of staff to intervene where warranted. The Union will be provided with a copy of the revised policy.

The recommended changes to the policy are provided in Attachment 1.

### **Technological Developments:**

Internet filtering of all PCs in children's areas was installed at Toronto Public Library in September 2000. The filtering software has worked as expected, and Library staff are not recommending any changes to the Board's decision on Internet filtering.

Since 2000, developments of interest and practical use to libraries have been in the area of management of Internet use in the Library. The dramatic increase in public demand for Internet access at the public library has created management issues such as: staff time involved in booking of PCs, enforcement of time limits for PC use, inability to authenticate customers booking PCs, equitable access to PCs. These management issues have driven development of solutions for libraries that have come onto the marketplace in the last couple of years.

Library staff identified at the time of amalgamation that automated management tools were desirable, though at the time there were few products commercially available and proven. The Library included funding for PC booking software in its 2001 capital budget, which was approved by Council. In July 2002 the Board approved the award of proposal for a PC booking system. The target date for implementation is January 2003.

The PC booking solution will manage access to public access PCs, enable patrons to sign up for use of public access PCs and control actual session time. The Library's vision is a system where any Library patron or staff can book any available public access PC from either the Web or any public access PCs in the Library.

The expected benefits are:

- better and more equitable access to computers for all Library users; the system will enforce time limits and Library rules on the number of bookable sessions in a set time period;
- convenience for all Library users; the system will allow Library users to book PCs remotely or in the Library, for any PCs in all 98 branches;
- decreased need for staff intervention; Library staff will not have to take bookings and will not have to enforce time limits; and

- reporting capabilities of product will provide valuable information for planning and service improvements.

Technically, it is possible for the system to track individual use. The Library will be only gathering information that is required to administer the booking system. The Library is governed by the Municipal Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act legislation in regards to all personal information that it collects. For example, if an individual books a PC one week in advance, the system would keep all pertinent information until the booking had been satisfied.

### **Public Training:**

Toronto Public Library continues to pursue opportunities to educate members of the public about the Internet and issues related to privacy and safety. Information on these topics is included in training sessions offered to children, parents and to general audiences.

We currently offer *Families on the Net* workshops. These sessions include information about safety, use of the Internet for homework help, and fun sites to visit. The whole focus of this training is to encourage parents, guardians and other community partners to play an active role in guiding children in the use of the Internet. We also provide information about Internet safety as a part of class visits for elementary and high school students.

There are several opportunities for expanding the public training currently being provided.

Staff are working on the *Families on the Net* workshop to tailor it for presentations to community groups, such as parent councils and parents using family resource programs. This type of session and information about managing Internet service may also be of interest to staff in other City of Toronto departments. Library staff will pursue providing this type of training to other City departments that are also offering public access to the Internet.

Basic messages about privacy and safety when using the Internet will be included in training for other groups such as adults and seniors attending user education courses such as *Web for Beginners*.

It can be difficult to attract audiences to sessions solely on the topic of web safety. We expect to have greater success and to reach more of our target audiences, both internal and external, through presentations to community groups and by including safety, privacy and responsible use messages in a number of types of training sessions.

### **Staff Training:**

Toronto Public Library provides a wide range of staff training and development activities which support staff in researching and developing high quality Internet services, providing public Internet access in a safe and welcoming environment and delivering effective reference service and user education sessions to individuals and groups.

Staff members participate in a variety of professional and technical conferences and workshops where the latest developments in Internet service are introduced.

Internal training opportunities are also available. *Managing Internet Services* provides an overview of TPL's Internet Policy and Rules of Conduct as they relate to public Internet access in branches. This program was initially offered to all Library staff members and continues to be offered to targeted staff including the Rovers who worked in Library branches in the summer of 2002 providing hands on computer training to the public. The Media Awareness Program *Safe Passage: Fact or Folly* focuses on the issues of child safety on the Internet. The program is offered to staff so that they can provide this information to the public. Orientation sessions for staff working in the *Leading to Reading* and *Kids @ Computers* programs include a detailed overview of TPL's Internet Policy and electronic services for children. In addition, a variety of courses aimed at building staff subject expertise in electronic services are offered on an ongoing basis. Specific examples include *Business and Company Information*, *Community Information*, *News and Current Events* and *Consumer Health*. New gateways on the Virtual Reference Library are first introduced to Library staff.

Staff members will continue to participate in a wide range of internal and external development activities to support the provision high quality electronic services. Staff will be given an overview of the PC Booking solution and guidelines for its use before its introduction to the public in January 2003. *Managing Internet Services* will be updated and offered to new staff on an ongoing basis. The Union will be consulted regarding staff training with particular reference to staff safety. A new course in children's reference service emphasizing the principles of Internet safety and evaluating Internet resources for children will be launched as a support for public training.

#### Conclusion:

The Library recognizes the importance of regularly reviewing its services to identify any opportunities for improvement. The changes to the Internet use policy recommended in this report as well as the initiatives in staff and public training and automated computer booking will contribute to Internet services at the Library that encourage the appropriate and knowledgeable use of this very important information resource.

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City Librarian

#### List of Attachments:

Toronto Public Library Board Internet Use Policy