

## **GERING PUBLIC LIBRARY INTERNET AND PUBLIC ACCESS COMPUTER POLICY**

### **Purpose of the Policy**

To affirm intellectual freedom, equality of access, individual responsibility, confidentiality of information about users and their use of all library resources including electronic resources, and safeguarding of First Amendment rights.

### **Access to Internet Resources**

In response to advances in technology and the changing needs of the community, the Gering Public Library endeavors to develop and provide free and open access for patrons of all ages and backgrounds to collections, resources, and services that meet the cultural, informational, recreational, and educational needs of the Gering community. Throughout its history, the Gering Public Library has made information available in a variety of formats, from print materials to audiovisual materials. The library's computer system provides the opportunity to integrate electronic resources from information networks around the world with the library's other resources.

Not everyone currently has or can afford access to the Internet in their homes or businesses. The library can "level the playing field" by providing everyone with open access to this valuable information resource. Even those who can afford access may need it only intermittently and may not wish to pay for it on a regular basis. Others know that information can be found there, but prefer to rely on experienced, trained library staff to assist them with their searches. It is within this context that the Gering Public Library offers access to the Internet.

The Internet, as an information resource, enables the library to provide information beyond the confines of its own collection. It allows access to ideas, information and commentary from around the globe. Currently, however, it is an unregulated medium. As such, while it offers access to a wealth of material that is personally, professionally, and culturally enriching to individuals of all ages, it also enables access to some material that may be offensive, disturbing and/or illegal, inaccurate, or incomplete. Patrons are encouraged to be good information consumers by evaluating the validity of information accessed via the Internet.

The Gering Public Library does not monitor and has no control over the information accessed through the Internet and cannot be held responsible for its content, including those that have filters. The Internet is a global entity with a highly diverse user population and library patrons use it at their own risk.

All Internet resources accessible through the library are provided equally to all library patrons. The library does not act *in loco parentis* (in the place of the parent); it cannot usurp that right nor assume that responsibility. Parents or guardians, not the library or its staff, are responsible for the Internet information selected and/or accessed by their children. Parents -- and only parents -- may restrict their children -- and only their children -- from access to Internet resources accessible through the library. Parents are advised to supervise their children's Internet sessions.

Library staff will identify specific starting points for searches on the library's home page that are appropriate to the library's mission and service roles. The library cannot control or monitor other material that may be accessible from Internet sources because the Internet is a vast and unregulated medium with access points that can and do change often, rapidly and unpredictably.

The library upholds and affirms the right of each individual to have access to constitutionally protected material. The library also affirms the right and responsibility of parents to determine and monitor their own children's use of library materials and resources. The Gering Public Library does not censor its patrons' access to those materials or attempt to protect them from information which they may find offensive.

Library staff is available to provide assistance and to help identify appropriate sites. The user, however, is the selector in using the Internet and makes individual choices and decisions. Not all library staff is at the same level of training and, although the level of staff assistance may not be equal at all times, the staff will be glad to assist its patrons in accessing the Internet.

Patrons may not always be able to go to the places on the Internet that they want to visit. There are many reasons, among them:

- There are too many Internet visitors and the host computer has closed or limited access from the "outside world."
- The database or resource is licensed to a particular institution, in which case the patron would need to be affiliated with that institution in order to get access.
- The host computer has changed its address or has closed down.
- The library's Internet connection may be periodically and temporarily inoperable due to technical difficulties.
- Library staff must perform periodic maintenance on the computers in the library, thus making them unavailable for periods of time.

## **Conditions and Terms of Use in the Library**

Due to the demand placed on Internet resources, patrons may log on to a computer twice a day. Computers will not be reserved and will be available on a first come first served basis. Patrons who want to use a computer must sign in at the circulation desk and receive a pin number. One computer is setup for twenty minutes only with no additional time. Children and teen computers are setup for one hour times. The other computers are setup for one hour time with additional time if one, other than the twenty minute computer, is available. Laptops have filters and are available as needed. Patrons must log off computers fifteen minutes before closing time.

The library's computers are set up for optimal usage by a single individual. In some cases, such as a parent/guardian with children, it may be important for two or more people to work together at a computer. Otherwise, because of limited space, only one person may work at any one computer.

Any person, regardless of age or residency, may have access to the electronic resources at the Gering Public Library. Children under the age of 17 years old must have a parent or legal guardian supervision while using the Internet, unless using the filtered computers in the children's or teen areas. Patrons, 17 years old and over, are given preference on the unfiltered computers. Youth, 16 years old and under, have preference on the filtered computers.

Adults using computers must continue to supervise all children accompanying them to the library.

A variety of programs are available in addition to Internet access. Anti-virus software is installed on all public access computers.

A shared-use printer is available. There will be a ten cent charge for each black and white printed page. Some documents on web sites are lengthy; users are reminded that they are financially responsible for all printouts. Laptops are not connected to the network, so printing is not an option on them.

Library patrons are able to access their own personal email accounts or set up email accounts through a web browser, but the library cannot supply email addresses on its own system.

The library expressly prohibits the use of its computers to access material that is obscene, child pornography, or "harmful to minors."

Misuse of any library computer will result in the loss of computer privileges, potential loss of library privileges and possible prosecution. Such misuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Using the computer for illegal activities;
- Violating Federal, State or local laws or regulations;
- Hacking into the library computer system or any other computer system;
- Damaging or attempting to damage computer equipment or software;
- Interfering with systems operations, integrity or security;
- Gaining unauthorized access to another person's files;
- Sending harassing messages to other computer users;
- Altering or attempting to alter the library computer's settings;
- Violating copyright laws and software licensing agreements;
- Violating other guidelines in this policy.

All computer users are asked to respect the privacy of others, although complete privacy cannot be expected in a public building.