

Pennsylvania State University
Equipping Librarians to Navigate Privacy Issues Involving Preteens and Technology

Introduction: Dr. Priya Kumar (PI), assistant professor at Pennsylvania State University, seeks a three-year, \$414,165 early career research development grant from the IMLS's Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program to develop, implement, and disseminate a toolkit that equips librarians to navigate privacy issues related to preteen engagement with technology, in partnership with the Maryland State Library Agency. This project aligns with LB21 Objective 2.3 by supporting an untenured LIS faculty in advancing their research agenda.

Three research questions animate this project:

- (1) What privacy issues arise when preteens engage with technology in public libraries?
 - a. How do librarians navigate privacy issues relating to preteens and technology?
 - b. What challenges do librarians face in addressing privacy issues relating to preteens and technology?
- (2) How can a theory-based privacy literacy framework help librarians address privacy issues surrounding preteen engagement with technology?
- (3) How can a privacy-focused community of practice help librarians navigate challenges that arise from preteen engagement with technology?

Project Justification: Privacy is a core value of librarianship, and many library policies are designed to support patron privacy. However, librarians can find it challenging to carry out privacy-related policies in youth service practice (e.g., [McDonald et al., 2023](#)). This is due to the networked nature of the activities that preteens engage in online (e.g., gaming, social media posting), the variety of devices preteens use in libraries (e.g., library computers, school-issued devices, personal smartphones), the multiple authorities to whom preteens are accountable (e.g., parent, other caregivers, teachers, school administrators), and preteens' developmental orientation toward boundary-testing (e.g., [Subramaniam et al., 2018](#)). Additionally, while privacy rules for youth may seem straightforward (e.g., don't share passwords, don't talk to unknown people online), they may not reflect how preteens experience the world (e.g., sharing passwords and connecting with people in online games can be important elements of friendship) ([Kumar et al., 2020](#)). Contemporary theory recognizes privacy as a socially situated practice that is negotiated collaboratively, rather than individually (e.g., [Dourish & Anderson, 2006](#); [Nissenbaum, 2010](#)). How to translate this insight into guidance that can directly inform youth service practice remains an open question, one that this project addresses. Prior IMLS funding (e.g., [Data Privacy Project](#), [Safe Data | Safe Families](#), [Library Freedom Institute](#), [Prioritizing Privacy](#)) has advanced librarians' privacy knowledge and skills. This project builds on that work by equipping librarians to apply a theory-based privacy framework toward serving a special patron population—preteens—who are actively developing their understandings of how to engage with technology in socially appropriate ways.

The PI's current research focuses on the role of librarians in privacy literacy efforts. After five years of research on how children, parents, and teachers conceptualized children's privacy, the PI developed a framework for privacy literacy ([Kumar & Byrne, 2022](#)) grounded in the well-established theory of contextual integrity, which approaches privacy as the appropriate flow of information ([Nissenbaum, 2010](#)). Through a pilot study, the PI has affirmed that librarians value the framework and would like guidance on how to use it to address youth-related privacy issues (Wieczorek et al., manuscript in preparation). By enabling the PI to expand on these pilot findings, this grant would advance LB21 Objective 2.3, supporting two goals that drive the PI's research agenda: translating privacy theory into practice and strengthening youth privacy literacy.

Project Work Plan: The project adopts a design-based research approach ([Collins et al, 2004](#); [Sanders & Stappers, 2019](#)) that unfolds in three phases. In Phase 1 (Months 1-18), the PI and a graduate research assistant (GRA) will iteratively design the privacy literacy toolkit in collaboration with librarians. This will involve conducting 8 co-design workshops with public libraries in Maryland. The Maryland State Library Agency has provided a verbal commitment to partner in Phase 1 and connect the research team with a diverse group of libraries. The PI and GRA will analyze the data using a combination of structural, descriptive, pattern, and versus coding ([Saldaña, 2021](#)) and use the findings to develop a prototype toolkit. A design consultant with expertise in graphic design and design thinking will help design the workshops and create a prototype based on

the workshop findings. Phase 1 will address RQ1 and RQ3. The PI has received IRB approval for the pilot test, and the PI will file an amendment during the pre-proposal period to extend this approval to cover Phase 1.

In Phase 2 (Months 19-30), the PI and GRA will recruit four libraries in a different state to implement the toolkit and apply it to address a privacy issue related to youth and technology engagement. The PI is engaging with another state agency and will have a Phase 2 partner in place by Spring 2024. Once the four participating libraries have been identified, the research team will recruit one person in each library to serve as a “privacy literacy leader” who will head the library’s toolkit implementation. The research team will host an orientation and monthly virtual group check-ins so the leaders can regularly share their experiences with each other and exchange ideas. The toolkit will contain materials to help leaders develop plans for addressing their privacy issue and documenting their efforts. The PI and GRA will collect the documentation from each library and hold focus groups with each library and with all privacy leaders to debrief and collect their feedback. The team will analyze this material using the same techniques from Phase 1. Based on the findings of this analysis, the team will work with the design consultant to improve the toolkit. Phase 2 will address RQ2 and RQ3. Toward the end of Phase 1, the PI will apply for IRB-approval for Phase 2. In Phase 3 (Months 31-36), the PI and GRA will finalize the toolkit and disseminate it widely. All toolkit materials will be publicly available online. The team will offer webinars and presentations to state library agencies as well as present the toolkit at national and regional library conferences. The team will also write about the toolkit for practitioner-oriented venues (e.g., *Library Journal*, *Children and Libraries*, and *Young Adult Library Services*). The PI is engaging with youth-oriented library associations and will have a dissemination partner in place by Spring 2024.

Project Leader: Dr. Kumar has a proven ability to lead high-quality research on children’s privacy literacy ([Kumar, 2022](#); [Kumar & Byrne, 2022](#); Kumar et al., [2017](#); [2018](#); [2019](#); [2020](#); [2023](#)). In 2022, Dr. Kumar received a prestigious Ralph E. Powe Junior Faculty Enhancement Award from the Oak Ridge Associated Universities to fund a pilot study exploring how librarians incorporate privacy literacy into their work with youth. She has presented on privacy literacy at ALA’s LibLearnX and at the annual conferences of the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association and the Maryland Library Association. To support this research, an advisory board consisting of two librarians with expertise in youth services and privacy and two scholars with expertise in youth, technology, and libraries, will provide guidance. The board will be in place by Spring 2024.

Diversity Plan: To ensure that project findings and materials equip librarians to address youth-related technology challenges in a way that advances DEI efforts, we will recruit a diverse sample of library systems to participate in Phase 1 and Phase 2, prioritizing those that serve a range of communities, including low-income and ethnically diverse communities across urban, suburban, and rural areas. Furthermore, the research team (PI, GRA, design consultant) bring diverse life experiences and disciplinary perspectives as a woman of color, international student, and first-generation college student, respectively, whose work spans library and information studies, media and communication studies, human-computer interaction, and design.

Project Results: The project will generate a toolkit that youth services librarians can use to support preteens at a critical point: when they are developing expectations and absorbing norms surrounding tech and privacy. The toolkit will help librarians diagnose privacy issues, identify who can contribute to addressing them, and develop and implement plans to address the issues. Though the final design will depend on the findings, the toolkit will likely include materials for activities such as: understanding and applying a privacy literacy framework to youth-related technology issues, stakeholder mapping, and analyzing the youth privacy impacts of library policies. The toolkit will also include guidance on how state library agencies can foster a privacy-focused community of practice among their youth service librarians. All materials will be publicly available and disseminated according to the Phase 3 plan.

Budget Summary: The proposed budget is \$414,165 and covers (1) half-month PI summer salary for three years and one PI course release (\$41,306), (2) Fringe benefits (\$28,829), (3) travel support (\$15,000), (4) workshop supplies (\$2,960), (5) contract with design consultant (\$6,000), (6) GRA support for three years (\$175,699), (7) participant stipends and transcription (\$13,950), and (8) indirect costs (\$130,421).