

West Virginia Executive Branch

Privacy Policy: *Accountability, Privacy Policy Definitions*

Privacy Defined

Question:

Have you ever thought about what “privacy” means to you? Hmmmm.....

Answer:

The word “privacy” has many definitions, and it means different things to different people.

For some people, privacy is all about being left alone – being able to avoid unwanted marketing communications. Other people care more about being anonymous – the ability to shop or associate without having to provide any personally identifiable information (PII.) For others, privacy is synonymous with control, the ability to freely take actions without fear of retribution, such as voting, checking out library books or even having access to birth control. Civil liberty concerns are still another aspect of privacy – being free from unnecessary surveillance or intrusion into our private lives.

All of these concepts are important, but they are not necessarily helpful as we try to understand the West Virginia Executive Branch Privacy Policies. How should we think about “privacy” when we’re applying the policies?

The West Virginia Privacy Policies define “privacy” somewhat differently. From the definitions, we see that “privacy” means “the appropriate use and disclosure of PII under the circumstances.” What is appropriate will depend on context, law and individual expectations, as well as the right of an individual to control the collection, use and disclosure of PII.”

By thinking about privacy as the “appropriate use of PII under the circumstances,” many of our traditional concepts make sense. This definition helps explain why sometimes we are happy to provide highly-sensitive PII, but other times we are not. (It’s one thing to tell my doctor about my health conditions, but I may not want to share that information with my employer.)

As you put the privacy policies into practice, focusing on “appropriate use given the circumstances” will help you make the best decisions.