

Hooksett Public Library Reference Policy

Mission: The Hooksett Public Library is a community resource center providing quality, high-demand: materials, programs, information and technology.

Purpose of this Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide library staff with guidelines for conducting reference transactions, including behavior and attitude, model interviewing behaviors, and the scope of reference services available to our patrons. It also supplements our *Collection Development Policy* by providing guidelines for maintaining a collection of reference materials suitable for fulfilling the library's mission. This policy will be used as a training tool for all new staff.

Goals

1. The Hooksett Public Library will assist its patrons in locating accurate answers to their questions through either its own resources or appropriate referrals.
2. The Library will provide its patrons with accurate, up-to-date resources in a variety of formats including print material, audio and visual media, computer software, electronic databases, and unfiltered Internet access.
3. The Library will inform community residents of the reference services and resources available to them, both in house and through outside channels.

Definition of a Reference Transaction

According to the American Library Association's Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a reference transaction is: "An information contact that involves the use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources, or knowledge of such sources, by a member of the reference or information staff."

Though the definition uses the term "reference or information staff," we recognize that, as a small library, all library staff participate in reference transactions during the course of his/her duties. This policy will use the term "library staff" in place of "reference or information staff."

When the Reference Librarian is not available, staff shall begin a reference interview with the patron to determine if they are able to answer the patron's needs. If it is determined that they need reference assistance beyond the skill level of the staff member, the staff member will record the details of the request, the patron's contact information and let the patron know when they can expect to be contacted by the Reference Librarian, to be within two days of the Reference Librarian's return to work or availability.

General Guidelines

Behavior and Attitude

The Library staff may be called upon to answer reference questions through a variety of different media: face to face contact, telephone, e-mail, written mail, social networking platforms or Internet chat software. Though certain media may restrict certain types of communication, library staff will employ and exhibit a good public service attitude at all times. The staff member on duty will look approachable and attentive by looking up from the desk often, regardless of work being done, and be aware of patrons browsing in the vicinity.

Staff members will be proactive and approach patrons with the offer of assistance whenever appropriate.

Reference Interview

When conducting a reference interview, the staff should practice the following “Model Reference Behaviors,” and be:

Welcoming

Make eye contact with the patron. Smile, and greet them.

Attending

Give full attention, maintain eye contact, and make attentive comments.

Listening

Paraphrase or repeat the question to demonstrate understanding, or clarify a question if unclear. Do not interrupt the patron.

Inquiring

Use open questions and active listening to determine the patron’s information needs. Though staff should conduct as thorough a reference interview as possible, they should make sure they don’t embarrass the patron or invade the patron’s privacy when addressing sensitive topics.

Verifying

Paraphrase or repeat patron’s question, ask if that is the specific question

Searching

Find answer, accompany patron source, report progress, offer referral

Informing

Cite source where answer is found, confirm understanding of answer. If the patron has trouble understanding the source, staff should search for an alternate source.

Following up

Ask: “Does this (completely) answer your question?” or a similar phrase

Extent of Reference Search

Though library staff shall try to treat all patrons with equal respect, and all questions with equal attention, the manner in which the patron contacts the library may limit the scope of the reference search.

Telephone reference will be limited to information that does not require extensive amounts of time and research. Brief facts and information can be supplied and a source cited. If the question cannot be answered quickly and easily the staff member can take the patron’s name and telephone number and then call the patron back with an answer or referral as quickly as possible. If the question will take a lengthy amount of research and staff time then the staff should encourage the patron to visit the library for assistance.

Written requests for information received by mail will be answered by the reference staff within one week of its arrival.

Email requests for information will be acknowledged within two days and answered completely or referred within one week of its receipt.

Social networking platform requests for information will be acknowledged within two days and answered completely within one week of receipt.

Internet Chat requests for information will be responded to immediately as received. Requests shall be treated in the same parameters as a telephone reference request.

Text message requests for information will be responded to immediately as received. Due to the limited nature of the technology, only ready reference questions will be answered. Anything requiring an interview, patron will be encouraged to contact the library via another mode of communication.

Level of Assistance

Library staff will advise patrons of the sources available that will answer their inquiry and where those sources are located. Library staff will accompany the patron to the specific area or source. The staff is encouraged to instruct the patron in the use of the material so they may undertake their own research.

The library staff will endeavor to find an answer to every question or make an appropriate referral; this may require the patron to view, process, and organize the information provided. The staff should use good judgment at all times, and will adhere to the ALA Code of Ethics (see Appendix) in all reference transactions.

The patron and library staff may make a special appointment for more specific instruction, particularly in the use of electronic resources, as time permits.

Interpretation of Materials

Laws, statutes, medical information and financial information can be read to the patron verbatim and assistance may be given to help a patron reach an understanding of the material. Library staff should make no attempt to interpret the material or provide any personal advice on legal, medical, or financial matters, nor offer to appraise the value of books or any other items. Likewise, during income tax season, when the library provides tax forms as a public service, library staff should not attempt to give tax advice.

Impartiality

Under no circumstances should library staff promote or recommend individual doctors, medical professionals, lawyers, legal services or financial services providers; however, staff may supply patrons with directories of such providers. Library staff will conduct the reference interview and provide reference service in a non-judgmental manner.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Reference topics will remain confidential between the patron and the library staff handling the request for information. Library staff may divulge a reference question to another library staff member, or colleague in another library, who is better able to answer the patron's question, if necessary. At the same time, library staff should be tactful in dealing with questions that may embarrass or cause discomfort to the patron, and should not ask questions unrelated to the patron's request.

Referrals

Unanswered questions will be referred to other sources such as other libraries, various types of agencies, or individuals when all our in-house sources have been exhausted. We will refer the patron to another source if materials require patron browsing for a specific answer and when the materials do not circulate through interlibrary loan.

Reference Collection and Maintenance

Materials will be acquired for the reference collection in accordance with the Library's *Collection Development Policy*. Encyclopedias will be updated every two to five years, acquisitions funds permitting.

Other reference materials are updated as funds permit. Medical and legal reference sources will be updated as often as necessary to keep these collections current and accurate.

Community Resources

Reference staff shall continuously assess patron needs, and collect, and if necessary, create materials and resources containing information that can't be found elsewhere. Such materials may include cemetery records, local ordinances, emergency management, school policies and curricula.

Genealogy and Local History

The library will collect materials covering the history of Hooksett and the state of New Hampshire when appropriate. The library shall work collaboratively with other local organizations, and develop services and collections which minimize overlap with existing services. Library staff should be familiar with collections of other local organizations, historical societies, municipalities and libraries, so they may make appropriate referrals.

Electronic Resources

Library staff will use any and all electronic resources—including subscription databases, recommended websites, and library catalogs—available to aid the patron in their information needs. If the patron is in-house they should be instructed in the use of any sources they may use themselves.

Promotion of and Instruction in Reference Services

Library staff will promote reference services within the library by providing or creating guides and pathfinders explaining how to select, use, and evaluate information from available sources. Classes on the use of electronic resources will be offered based on patron demand or individual instruction will be provided as needed.

Statistics

Library staff will conduct a week long reference survey two to four times per year. The surveys will be used to track the number of reference questions that are asked, in order to estimate the number of yearly reference transactions. This process will be overseen by the Assistant Director or acting Reference Librarian. The Assistant Director or acting Reference Librarian will use an online tracking form to record reference questions to determine trends in the community's information needs.

Staff Performance and Training

Staff development will be accomplished through scheduled in-house training; workshops put on by professional organizations, or tutorials provided by database vendors. All staff members are expected to participate in database trainings and to be familiar and/or fluent with online resources provided by the library for public use. Staff participation will be tracked and monitored by the Assistant Director.

