

Chapter 8

Public Services: Reference and Reader's Advisory Services

Through public services, a library offers assistance to patrons in the use of its collections and resources. The library also provides patrons with resources beyond those owned by the library through interlibrary loan and other resource-sharing arrangements. Basic public services include reference and reader's advisory. These services should be provided to all age groups.

Applicable Core Standards—Please see Core Standards 1, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, and 24 in Chapter 1.

Reference Services

Reference service is the provision of information in response to a patron's question.

All Illinois public libraries should provide or contract to provide professional reference service for their patrons. For purposes of this document *professional reference service* refers to reference service provided by a person holding an MLS degree from an ALA-accredited program.

Because so many Illinois public libraries serve sparsely populated communities and, as a result, often lack the funding to hire a full-time qualified librarian, other approaches, such as the following, may be required:

- Implement mergers of several small libraries or library services
- Form consortiums of several small libraries with one central reference library
- Access and use specialized resources; for example, the Illinois State Library's reference service's (1-800-665-5576) collection strengths in Illinois and federal documents, maps, patents, and trademarks.
- Initiate contracts between small libraries and larger libraries for reference service
- Develop a service program to share qualified librarians, with several small libraries pooling funds to employ and share a qualified librarian who would handle collection management, train staff, and provide backup reference service, and perhaps function as a circuit librarian by working suitable hours at each site
- Plan and implement cooperative collection development in which the purchase of specific reference works is assigned to each library in the group
- Initiate cooperative hours of service, with a group of libraries coordinating their hours of reference service to provide their combined patrons with access to reference service for a greater number of hours (a number of Illinois public libraries already provide late-night reference service using this approach)

Reference Services Standards

1. All basic services are available when the library is open. For the purpose of this document, basic services are circulation, reference, reader's advisory, and computer/Internet access. If reference and reader's advisory are provided to children and adults from two separate points, then the library provides adequate staffing at both locations at all hours the library is open.
2. The library has a board-approved reference service policy developed by reference staff and administration and it is reviewed biennially. (See Appendix R)
3. The library provides staff trained in reference services to meet the needs of patrons who have challenges with disabilities, language, and literacy.
4. The library participates in interlibrary loan and resource sharing to help provide accurate and timely reference service.
5. The library is aware of the importance of accuracy in reference service and relies on information sources of demonstrated currency and authority.
6. The library supports training in the use of technologies necessary to access electronic resources, including training for persons with disabilities in the use of adaptive equipment and software.
7. The library provides easy access to accurate and up-to-date community information/resource files.
8. The library provides current issues of at least one community or local newspaper and retains hard-copy or online back issues for a minimum of six months.
9. The library provides access to local ordinances or codes of all municipalities within its service boundaries.
10. The library provides access to local and state maps.
11. The library strives to provide access to the minutes of local government meetings. These include but are not limited to municipal (village, township, or city) and school board meetings.
12. The library provides voter information, including precinct boundaries and location of polling places.
13. The library provides information about local history and events.
14. The library has telephone books for the local calling area and any other frequently requested areas.
15. The library will include at least one current reference resource for each subject area. Electronic resources may fulfill this requirement. (See Appendix T)
16. Staff has access to a telephone or computer to receive and respond to requests for information and materials and to contact other agencies for information.
17. All staff members attend at least one reference-related continuing education event each year.
18. The library accepts and responds to reference requests received via e-mail, IM (instant messaging), texting, and/or virtual reference.
19. The library annually evaluates its reference service for accuracy, timeliness, staff friendliness, and patron ease. (See Appendix S)

Reference Services Checklist

- All basic services are available when the library is open.
- The library has a reference service policy.
- The library provides staff trained in reference services to meet the needs of patrons who have challenges with disabilities, language, and literacy.
- The library participates in interlibrary loan and resource sharing to help provide accurate and timely reference service.
- The library is aware of the importance of accuracy in reference service and relies on information sources of demonstrated currency and authority.
- The library supports training in the use of technologies necessary to access electronic resources, including training for persons with disabilities in the use of adaptive equipment and software.
- The library provides easy access to accurate and up-to-date community information/resource files.
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- The library provides access to local and state maps.
- The library provides access to the minutes of local government meetings. These include but are not limited to municipal (village, township, or city) and school board meetings.
- The library provides voter information, including precinct boundaries and location of polling places.
- The library provides information about local history and events.
- The library has telephone books for the local calling area and any other frequently requested areas.
- The library has at least one current reference resource for each subject area.
- Staff has access to a telephone or computer to receive and respond to requests for information and materials and to contact other agencies for information.
- All staff members attend at least one continuing education event each year.
- The library evaluates its reference service on an annual basis.

Bibliography

- Cassell, Kay Ann and Uma Hiremath. *Reference and Information Services in the 21st Century: An Introduction*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2006.
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- Janes, Joseph. *Introduction to Reference Work in the Digital Age*. New York: Neal Schuman, 2003.
- Johnson, Peggy. *Fundamentals of Collection Development and Management*. 2nd ed. Chicago: ALA, 2009.
- Kresh, Diane. *The Whole Digital Library Handbook*. Chicago: ALA, 2007.
- O'Gorman, Jack, ed. *Reference Sources for Small and Medium-sized Libraries*. 7th ed. Chicago: ALA, 2008.

Reader's Advisory Services

Reader's Advisory Services is a patron-oriented service that promotes and encourages recreational reading. It is a service that offers advice, suggestions, recommendations, and selections to library users regarding authors, titles, and genres. It is a service that strives to respond to the recreational reading tastes of individual reading using the resources of the library to link readers and books.

All Illinois public libraries should provide some sort of reader's advisory service to their patrons. This can be done formally with a separate designated service desk or informally at the library's circulation desk where library staff gets to know the library patron's reading preferences and is able to suggest similar titles that the patron might enjoy reading.

Reader's Advisory Standards

1. All basic services are available when the library is open. For the purpose of this document, basic services are circulation and reference and reader's advisory services. If reference and reader's advisory services are provided to children and adults from two separate points, then the library provides adequate staffing at both locations at all hours the library is open.
2. The library has competently trained staff that has thorough knowledge of popular authors and titles.
3. The library participates in interlibrary loan and resource sharing to help provide accurate and timely reader's advisory service.
4. The library is aware of the importance of accuracy in reader's advisory service and relies on information sources of demonstrated currency and authority.
5. Staff has access to a telephone or computer to receive and respond to requests for information and materials and to contact other agencies for information.
6. Staff members who are responsible for reader's advisory services in their library should attempt to stay current with community events by participating in community organizations, clubs, or councils.
7. Staff members who are responsible for reader's advisory services in their library should attempt to attend as many workshops, reading roundtables, or continuing education events that they can to stay current.
8. The library accepts and responds to reader's advisory requests received via e-mail, IM (instant messaging), texting, and/or virtual reference.

Reader's Advisory Services Checklist

- ___ All basic services are available when the library is open.
- ___ The library has competently trained staff that has thorough knowledge of popular authors and titles.
- ___ The library maintains a well-rounded collection of both fiction and nonfiction titles.
- ___ The library has a reader's advisory services policy.
- ___ The library promotes the importance of leisure reading to its community members.
- ___ The library participates in interlibrary loan and resource sharing to help provide accurate and timely reference service.

- ___ The library maintains a basic collection of reader's advisory reference materials.
- ___ All staff members attend at least one continuing education event each year.
- ___ Staff members who are responsible for reader's advisory services in their library join at least one community organization, club, or council.
- ___ Staff members who are responsible for reader's advisory services in their library attend at least one workshop, reading roundtable, or continuing education event.
- ___ The library accepts and responds to reader's advisory requests received via e-mail, IM (instant messaging), texting, and/or virtual reference.

Bibliography

- Booth, Heather. *Serving Teens through Readers' Advisory (ALA Reader's Advisory Series)*. Chicago: ALA, 2007.
- Herald, Diana Tixier and Wayne A. Wiegard. *Genreflecting: A Guide to Popular Reading Interests*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2006.
- Moyer, Jessica E., ed. *Research-Based Readers' Advisory (ALA Readers' Advisory Series)*. Chicago: ALA, 2007.
- Pearl, Nancy. *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason*. Seattle: Sadquatch, 2003.
- Ross, Catherine Sheldrick, Lynne (E. F.) McKechnie, and Paulette M. Rothbauer. *Reading Matters: What the Research Reveals about Reading, Libraries, and Community*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2005.
- Saricks, Joyce. *Reader's Advisory Services in the Public Library*. Chicago: ALA, 2005.

Web Sites

NoveList Plus—EBSCO
<http://www.ebscohost.com>

The Reader's Advisory Online—Libraries Unlimited:
<http://rainfo.lu.com/>

Appendix R

Topics Recommended for Reference Service Policy Manual

1. Reference service is available to all persons who reside within the jurisdictional boundaries of the library regardless of the age, race, sex, or social or economic status of the patron.
2. Reference materials are available for use in the library by everyone who resides within the jurisdictional boundaries of the library regardless of the age, race, sex, or social or economic status of the patron.
3. Staff trained to provide reference service is available during all hours the library is open.
4. Staff is trained in reference interviewing techniques, reader's advisory service, and in bibliographic instruction.
5. Staff treats all questions with equal respect.
6. Reference service is provided in response to all forms of inquiry including but not limited to the telephone, tele-facsimile, TTY and TDD, e-mail, and other electronic forms.
7. Reference questions that cannot be answered with onsite resources are referred to another agency. Such referrals are verified and/or mediated by library staff.
8. All requests for information receive an answer or status report within one working day.
9. The needs of the library users are treated with respect. Names of users and the transactions that occur between users and the reference staff are confidential and not discussed outside a professional context.
10. The library adopts and adheres to the ALA *Code of Ethics*.
11. Copies of this reference policy and the ALA *Code of Ethics* are available for patrons.
12. Use of online databases by cardholders and non-cardholders.

Additional topics to be addressed include:

Priorities, if any, in handling reference questions—phone or electronic forms vs. in person, resident vs. nonresident

Guidelines that address special categories of reference questions—homework, medical, legal, genealogy, etc.

Guidelines that address the loan of reference material—does not circulate, a few hours, or overnight

Appendix S

Topics Recommended for Evaluating Reference Service

Some of the factors that affect the quality of reference service are staff approachability and expertise in conducting a reference interview; the accuracy, usefulness, and completeness of information; hours of service; and ease with which patrons can use the facility.

It is important to determine what is being evaluated and then structure the questions accordingly.

Evaluating the quality of the information

Did you receive accurate, complete, and usable information in response to your question?

Evaluating the ability of the librarian to conduct a reference interview

- Was the librarian approachable?
- Was the librarian patient and encouraging in determining what information you needed?
- Did the librarian provide the source of the information?
- Did the librarian ask if the information answered your question?

The library may also wish to determine if there are significant changes in the number of reference questions that are asked from year to year or from month to month. This type of data is useful to determine if additional staff is needed or to assess if measures taken to increase patron use of reference service have been successful.

An annual count, using marks on a grid that may be divided into columns for days and hours, and rows for phone and in-person, will yield a variety of data.

If comparing the quantity of library patrons' reference questions with those asked in another library, "Reference Transactions per Capita" is the best measure. However, there must be verification that XYZ and ABC library use the same criteria for a reference question and have similar service points. (See Nancy Van House, et al., *Output Measures for Public Libraries*, 2nd ed. Chicago: ALA, 1987, pp. 65-66.)

Appendix T

Basic Reference Material List

Every library should have at least one reference resource for each subject area. It is expected that the library will obtain the most recent source where timeliness or currency is important.

Due to the fact that in many instances the most current information may be online, the physical format of these resources is left to the choice of the individual library.

I. GENERAL SOURCES

- Access to the Internet at the Reference Desk
- Almanac
- Encyclopedia
- Access to appropriate periodical databases
- Local telephone book

II. CONSUMER INFORMATION

- *Consumer Reports* magazine
- Guide to vehicle prices

III. READER'S ADVISORY

- Source for reader's advisory

IV. PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND RELIGION

- Source on world mythology
- Dictionary or encyclopedia of psychology
- Dictionary or encyclopedia of religion
- Dictionary or encyclopedia of philosophy

V. STATISTICS

- *Statistical Abstract of the United States*
- Census information for your community(ies)

VI. BUSINESS

- National business directory information
- Illinois business directory information
- Local business directory information

VII. LABOR

- No requirement

VIII. TAX INFORMATION

- Access to online or reproducible federal and Illinois tax forms

IX. LAW AND GOVERNMENT

- *Illinois Compiled Statutes*
- List of government officials serving your community(ies)

- X. OCCUPATIONS**
- Source of occupational information
- XI. EDUCATION**
- Guide to colleges
 - Local school report cards
 - Guide to scholarships
- XII. LANGUAGE**
- Unabridged English dictionary
- XIII. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**
- Science encyclopedia
 - Guide to animal species
- XIV. MEDICINE**
- Prescription drug source
 - Guide to diagnosis and treatment of diseases
 - Medical dictionary
- XV. SOCIAL CUSTOMS**
- *Chase's Calendar of Events*
 - Book of etiquette
- XVI. ART**
- Guide to art and artists
- XVII. ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES**
- Antiques and collectibles price guide
- XVIII. PERFORMING ARTS**
- Movie guide
- XIX. MUSIC**
- Dictionary or encyclopedia of music
- XX. GAMES AND SPORTS**
- Source for rules for games and sports
- XXI. LITERATURE**
- Index to poetry
 - Source of literary criticism
 - Style manual
 - Dictionary of quotations

XXII. HISTORY AND ETHNIC STUDIES

- Chronology of world history
- Dictionary or encyclopedia of American history
- Source for Illinois history

XXIII. GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL

- Atlas of the world
- Road atlas of the United States
- Map of local area

XXIV. BIOGRAPHY, NAMES, AND GENEALOGY

- Dictionary or encyclopedia of biography
- Guide to personal names

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Libraries should also have the following materials in their reference collections:

- Local building codes
- Local history materials
- Municipal code for your community
- Local newspapers