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|  <p style="text-align: center;">POLICY</p> | <p>SECTION: 6.4</p> <p>SUBJECT: Reference Services</p> |
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Staff at all Richmond Public Library locations will provide materials and services to help customers' access information to meet their personal, educational and professional needs. Staff will offer the same quality of service to all regardless of age, race, gender, nationality, educational background, disability, sexual orientation or any other criteria, which may be the source of discrimination. The Reference Services Policy provides standards for the staff that will ensure all customers receive consistently high levels of service. Reference service will be provided at all times that the Libraries are open.

Service to the public takes priority over other staff duties.

Reference service may take the form of in-person inquiry, telephone, online or postal. Staff will handle these questions on a first-come, first-served basis, although requests for directions and requests that can be answered quickly may be dealt with simultaneously with longer questions at staff's discretion.

In-person reference takes priority over telephone reference, mail reference and online reference.

Staff will conduct a reference interview to determine what information a patron needs and recommend what resources the Library has to meet that need. Reference services in departments/branches are supervised by designated Librarians and Library/Community Services Managers. Information requests beyond generally accessible knowledge (phone books, city listing, etc.) should be referred to Librarians or Library Associates. Staff should consult with the designated supervisor when assistance is needed to appropriately respond to a request for information.

Staff will refer a customer to other appropriate sources or institutions when a question cannot be answered to the satisfaction of the customer using RPL resources.

Staff will use reputable sources and give the citations when answering the customer.

Reference questions may require staff to accompany customers to the online catalog/databases to explain its use.

Staff will not debate with customers' personal opinions or beliefs in religion, politics, or social issues.

The purpose of the reference collection is to assure Library users of access to reference tools at all times that the Library is open. Reference materials, therefore, will not circulate.

Telephone reference:

Telephone reference should be of short duration.

Response to telephone references should take into consideration the following:

- Is the answer short enough to be given over the phone?
- Is the material needed to answer the question readily available?
- Does the answer require use of multiple sources? Require assimilation of material from multiple resources?
- Does answering the question involve too much phone time/staff time to answer the question adequately?

If a longer period of research is required, then staff should either take the customer's number and call back, or suggest that the customer visit the Library to access the materials with assistance from staff.

Telephone reference questions should be limited to a reasonable number; librarians will use their best professional judgment. Requests may be limited to 3 per call, including city directory inquiries, homework questions, dictionary definitions, stock quotations, etc.

In answering telephone requests for City Directory cross-reference, staff will not give information on neighbors of the requested address or name. If the request is a business and if the surrounding addresses are businesses, then a nearby address may be given.

Telephone reference service will not be refused on the basis that the question is a school assignment.

Internet assistance:

Staff will provide basic Internet search assistance or basic Word or Excel assistance. If more instruction is needed than staff can provide quickly, staff will recommend library computer classes to the customer. Staff will not do extensive computer-based research for a customer.

Medical, legal and other special information requests:

Staff will not give medical, copyright, financial or tax advice nor make appraisals on books, coins, stamps, antiques or collectibles.

Legal research will be conducted through the Public Law Library. General legal information (statutes from the Virginia Code, general information available through materials in the general collection) may be provided by General Collections. Legal advice will not be given.

Staff will not refer library users to individual practitioners – physicians, attorneys, mental health professionals or others.

Staff will provide a brief translation only if a staff member is available with the appropriate expertise.

Staff does not conduct genealogical research. Staff will refer genealogical questions to the Library of Virginia.

Staff does not provide typing, editorial or proofreading services.

Mail and Online Requests:

Mail from an inmate of a correctional institution will be forwarded to the Library of Virginia.

Online requests through Cyberlibrarian are handled by assigned staff. Online requests should receive a response within 2 business days.

Charges for mail or online requests (Check or Money Order are acceptable forms of payment):

- \$10.00 flat rate per request for copies of 1-10 pages to answer mail or online reference service requests. If the number of copies to answer a request exceeds 10 pages, then an additional \$0.50 per page will be charged. A maximum of 20 pages will be copied in response to a request.
- \$10.00 will be charged for each obituary requested.

We are unable to handle requests from outside the United States unless payment can be made in advance in US currency.

City Records:

Requests for City Records are handled by assigned staff. Requests should receive a response within 24 hours.

Approved: February 2009

Revised: February 2012