



RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY

Title: Reference Services Policy

Policy Number: 06.04

Revised Date: 07/23/2025

Staff at all Richmond Public Library (RPL) locations will provide materials and services to help patrons 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 patron.

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 brief. If a longer period of research is required, then staff should either take the patron'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 three (3) per call, including city directory inquiries, homework questions, dictionary definitions, stock quotations, etc.

Internet Assistance:

Staff will provide basic Internet search assistance or basic Microsoft Word or Excel software assistance. If more instruction is needed than staff can provide quickly, staff will recommend library computer classes to the patron.

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 will not conduct genealogical research.

Staff will not provide typing, editorial or proofreading services.

Mail and Online Requests:

Online requests through Cyber Librarian are handled by assigned staff. Online requests should receive a response within 24 hours.

City Records:

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

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