

MARTIN COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

TO: ALL LIBRARY STAFF

FROM: JENNIFER SALAS
LIBRARY DIRECTOR

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PUBLIC SERVICES MANAGER

SUBJECT: REFERENCE SERVICES

EFFECTIVE DATE	12/16/1999
Revised	02/17/2005
Revised	11/19/2008
Revised	08/29/2014
Revised	09/08/2015

POLICY:

The Martin County Library System will provide information services through a process of assisting library users to identify and evaluate sources of information in response to a particular question, interest, assignment, or problem.

AUTHORITY:

- [Florida Library Association Standards for Florida Public Libraries](#), Comprehensive Standards for Information Services.
- Florida Statutes, Ch. 257.25, Free Library Service
- Professional guidelines from Reference and User Services Association ([RUSA](#)) of the American Library Association (ALA).
- Library Board of Trustees
- Library Director

Related Document: STAFF GUIDELINES FOR REFERENCE SERVICES

APPROVED BY: _____
Jennifer Salas, Library Director

DATE:

APPROVED BY: _____
Library Board of Trustees

DATE:

MARTIN COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

STAFF GUIDELINES FOR REFERENCE SERVICES

Public Services Staff

Martin County Library System hiring and training practices reflect endorsement of *Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians* from [ALA/RUSA](#).

Performance guidelines for library staff who provide reference and informational services to library users include recommendations in five main areas:

1. Approachability,
2. Interest,
3. Listening/Inquiring,
4. Searching, and
5. Follow Up.

These standards for performance are discussed in detail in *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers* from [ALA/RUSA](#).

Some examples of recommended behavior:

- Offers mobile assistance at point-of-need whenever possible, rather than waiting for patrons to come to the desk;
- Remains visible to patrons as much as possible;
- Focuses attention on the patrons;
- Uses reference interview to gather as much information as possible without compromising user privacy;
- Explains the search strategy and sequence to the patrons;
- Explains the credibility of the sources to be used;
- Provides at least 2 sources of information for each answer, or multiple options when the query leads to referral for service; and
- Asks patrons if their questions have been completely answered.

ALA's *Code of Ethics* governs the conduct of all staff members providing information service. Among other points, the code promotes equitable access to service for all library users, the user's right to privacy and confidentiality, and distinction between personal convictions and professional duties.

Elements of Reference Service

- The library provides in-person information services by qualified staff during all open hours at the main library and during most open hours at the branches. Branches also have telephone access at all times to the main library reference staff (Florida Public Library Standards).
- The library provides remote information services via telephone, email, and live chat. It is the library's desire to support state-of-the-art communications methods for access to information resources for users, whether within or outside its building(s) (Florida Public Library Standards).
- Information provided to users in response to their queries is accurate and is derived from sources that meet professional standards of authority and recency, as outlined in the Martin County Library System Collection Development Policy (Florida Public Library Standards).
- When the library is not able to provide a patron with needed information, the patron or patron's question is referred to an outside agency, expert, or other library which can provide the needed information.

Remote Reference Service

- Telephone, email, and chat reference service is intended to provide short, factual information and to have a duration of approximately five minutes or less. Patrons with longer, more complex questions may be invited to visit the library in person for an assisted search.
- Library staff gives priority to the needs of on-site patrons. When service demands exceed available staff resources, telephone patrons receive a voice mail message requesting name, phone number, and nature of question. The next available staff person checks the phone messages and makes callbacks.

Scope of Service

The scope of service in answering Reference questions is determined by staff resources and professional guidelines and applies especially to the following subject areas: criss-cross information; stock quotations; homework questions; contests and puzzles; collectibles, antiques, and works of fine art; translations; material of a sexual nature; consumer evaluations; mathematics; medical, legal, business; technology, computer and Internet use. See *Guidelines for Medical, Legal, and Business Responses* from [ALA/RUSA](#).