

Goffstown Public Library Reference Policy

Mission of the Goffstown Public Library

Our mission is to offer access to quality educational, literary, technological and professional materials and programs to assist community residents of all ages in meeting their personal, educational and professional information needs.

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 new staff, and will be reviewed and revised periodically as needed.

Goals

1. The Goffstown 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 participates in reference transactions during the course of its duties. This policy will use the term "library staff" in place of "reference or information staff."

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, written mail, e-mail, 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. It is recommended that the staff member on duty rise from his/her chair when approached by a patron, look that person in the eye, and pay the utmost attention to what is being said.

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!

Probing

Use open probes to initiate inquiry and open probes after initial Probe. 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 2 days and answered completely or referred within one week of its arrival.

Request Priority

Reference requests can be made in person, over the telephone, by U.S. mail, or by e-mail at goflib@goffstown.lib.nh.us. Priority will be given to the individual who is in-house over the phone caller making a request. Library staff shall serve in-house patrons on a first come, first served basis. If patrons are waiting they should be informed that they will be assisted in order as soon as possible.

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; staff members should not merely point to the direction of the necessary material. 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. A reference search may include long distance phone calls, on-line searches through the State Library system and country wide interlibrary loan if a patron requests and the question requires a comprehensive search. 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 according to the following schedule, for as long as the library staff deems it appropriate to keep a print copy.

Title	Frequency
Encyclopedia Americana	every 3 years
Britannica	every 3 years
World Book	every 2 years
McGraw-Hill Sci and Tech	every 5 years
Lands & Peoples	every 3 years
Popular Science	every 3 years

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.

Periodicals

Library staff selects and retains periodicals based on potential community interest, circulation statistics, price, and availability in other formats. Periodicals which are available in full text through subscription databases may not necessarily be purchased separately in hard copy. It is the practice of the library staff to review and adopt new formats of technology for more convenient access by the patron. Titles are evaluated on an annual basis by the Assistant Library Director and additions and deletions are made at this time.

Gift subscriptions are evaluated with the same criteria as purchased subscriptions. These subscriptions are accepted or declined based on the needs of the library and the judgment of the Library Director.

Retention of Issues: *The New Hampshire Union Leader* is kept for 30 days. *The Goffstown News* is kept indefinitely. Other newspapers are kept for 2 weeks. Magazines are kept from six months to two years to indefinitely based on their usefulness and overall content.

Most periodical titles circulate for three-week periods except for the current issue, or any professional journals specific to the field of librarianship, which do not circulate. The newspaper collection does not circulate. There is no limit to magazines borrowed, and patrons are encouraged to photocopy material from non-circulating issues, or check EBSCOHost's MasterFile Premier Database for the full text of the article they are seeking.

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 Goffstown 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 references 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.

Statistics

Library staff will make a note of each reference question asked. Since patrons may ask a question of any staff member, each floor shall have its own notebook for recording questions. Library staff should mark questions received by phone with a circled letter P, by e-mail with an E, and any unfilled requests or unanswered questions with an X. The library director will compile statistics on a monthly basis of the number of reference questions asked.

Staff Performance and Training

Staff development will be accomplished through scheduled in-house training; workshops put on by professional organizations, and accredited college reference courses.

Problems or Complaints

Library staff shall refer any problems or difficult situations to the person in charge and/or the Director as necessary.

Appendix: Code of Ethics of the American Library Association

As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professionals providing information services, library trustees and library staffs.

Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict. The American Library Association Code of Ethics states the values to which we are committed, and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in this changing information environment.

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- IV. We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.
- V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
- VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.

- VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Adopted by the ALA Council

June 28, 1995

(Approved by Library Board of Trustees 9/21/05)