

Section 8 Reference Service Policy

8.1 Purpose and Goals:

Providing reference service is one of the primary roles of the Matteson Public Library Reference Department. Reference service is provided to Matteson and non-Matteson patrons regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnic background, educational level or purpose of inquiry.

Goal One: To provide materials and services to meet user's needs for timely, accurate and useful information.

Goal Two: To assist patrons in the use of library resources and helping patrons find library materials appropriate to their interests and age levels.

8.2 Responsibility:

Responsibility for the actual provision of reference services rests with the Adult Services Reference Department. The Reference Department is responsible for the overall quality and development of the library's reference services, the reference collection and for writing and implementing reference policies.

8.3 Availability of Service:

Reference service is available during all hours that the library is open and is available to any patron requesting it, regardless of residency. The entire collection—juvenile and adult, circulating and non-circulating—is available to patrons of all ages to answer reference questions. Several of the library's reference information databases are available to patrons for home access 24/7. Library patrons 17 years old or younger are required to have parental or a legal guardian permission to access the Internet.

8.4 Forms of Inquiry:

Reference service is provided in response to all forms of inquiry, including those made in person, by telephone, by fax, mail and e-mail.

8.5 Response to Questions:

Requests will generally be handled in the order in which they are received. Priority is given to in-person inquiries when walk-in and telephone requests are received at the same time, or during periods of heavy in-library reference activity. Staff will, however, complete a telephone conversation in progress before attending to an in-person request. Staff will attempt to answer questions at the time the request is made and within the time constraints of the patron. This may not be possible during busy times or involving complex questions. In such situations staff will inform the patron that a longer response time may be necessary.

8.6 Uses of Resources:

Generally, reference staff provides the answers to questions, and cite the sources(s) used, if the desired information may be found using on-site resources. However, if determining the answer to a question requires close reading and evaluation of extensive amounts of material – as, for instance, in the cases of research assignments, the staff member may enlist the patron’s assistance. In such cases, staff may suggest search strategies or gather likely sources of information, conferring with the patron one or more times to ensure adequacy and relevance of materials found.

8.7 Referral:

When the reference personnel determine that a question may be better answered by another agency, the patron is referred to that agency. For example, a patron may be referred to another library, a governmental agency, historical society or business.

8.8 Confidentiality and Impartiality:

All questions are handled in confidence and with impartiality. Staff does not offer opinions, interpretations or advice, nor do they attempt to abstract or condense information. However, judgments that fall within a librarian’s field of expertise are provided, including reader’s advisory and evaluation of reference tools.

8.9 Fees:

Charges are not currently made for reference service provided within the library other than those for material photocopied or printed by the patron.

8.10 Ethics and Standards:

The Matteson Public Library subscribes to the Librarian’s Code of Ethics of the American Library Association. The Library also meets the Minimum Reference Standards for Public Libraries established by the Suburban Library System. Copies of these Standards and of the Reference Service Plan are available for patrons to consult at the Reference Desk. Further clarification may be sought from the Head of Adult Services or the Library Administrator.

8.11 Periodic Review:

The Library Administrator and reference staff will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of reference service on an informal basis. Feedback, ideas and suggestions from the public are always welcome. Final Approval of any revision of the Reference Service Plan rests with the Board of Trustees.

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