Reference Services

This policy applies to reference services provided at Patrick Heath Public Library for library patrons of all ages. It serves as a resource for current staff and as a guide for new staff. Reference services are defined as information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet information needs. Reference services do not include formal instruction or exchanges that aid with locations, schedules, equipment, supplies, or policy statements (Reference and User Services Association, a division of the American Library Association).

I. Objectives of Service

The library strives to develop and implement, through continuous evaluation and adaptation, a program of reference services that effectively meets the informational, educational, recreational, and cultural needs of the entire community.

II. Specific Objectives:

A. To provide accurate, timely, up-to-date reference services in person, over the telephone, by letter, or electronically, including through social media.

B. To provide approachable, knowledgeable staff to assist patrons.

C. To encourage staff development in the areas of library reference services, materials, technology, and other related areas to provide consistent, high-quality service.

D. To instruct patrons in the use of library materials, electronic resources, technology, and facilities.

E. To cooperate with other community agencies, organizations, libraries, and the City of Boerne in their efforts to better serve the community.

F. To promote an increasing awareness of library services, technology, and resources.

F. To periodically evaluate patron satisfaction, policies, and procedures by various methods to ensure the best possible reference services.

III. Ethics/Confidentiality

Service is made available to all patrons on an equal basis, regardless of age, education, race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, income, political affiliation, physical limitations, geographic barriers, or any other criteria that may be a source of discrimination. Patrons do not need to be registered as
PHPL cardholders to seek reference assistance. Each request is taken seriously and treated with respect. All reference questions are confidential. The nature of the question asked, and the identity of the patron will not be discussed with other patrons. When referring reference questions to other staff members, discussion about the nature of the question asked and the identity of the patron will be kept to the minimum required by the referral. The nature of reference questions asked, and the identity of the patron shall not be divulged to any agency outside of those to which a patron may agree to be referred without a properly executed order from a court of law.

IV. Priorities

Available staff, material, technology, and facilities may vary from time to time, and services will be adjusted accordingly. The library recognizes that it is NOT a research library, although it collects materials useful in some areas of research and can be the access point to more extensive resources through the Internet, interlibrary loan, and referral to other agencies.

Because the goal of reference services at Patrick Heath Public Library is to provide accurate, complete, and timely information within the constraints of available resources, reference services are prioritized here:

A. Emergencies - weather alerts, natural disasters, active shooter incidents, accidents, etc

B. Direct personal service to patrons who come to the public services desks on a first-come, first-served basis.

C. Telephone service to patrons in the order in which calls are received.

D. Individual instruction on how to use the search catalog, the Internet, and other electronic resources.

E. Service to patrons corresponding with the library by mail or electronically, including through social media.

V. Handling Inquiries

A. Service Questions - Staff provides information regarding library facilities, services, and hours to patrons whenever necessary.

B. Ready Reference - Ready reference questions (phone numbers, addresses, names, etc.) are answered during all open library hours. Answers are given as quickly as possible. Patrons at public services desks take precedence over patrons who contact us remotely. Staff will avoid reading lengthy passages from materials over the telephone in response to phoned-in questions. In the interest of protecting individuals'
privacy rights, directory information about individuals, such as a telephone number or address, will not be given out over the telephone; instead, patrons will be referred to online telephone directories and telephone companies' directory services.

C. General Reference and Research Questions - General reference questions requiring more work than ready reference but less work than research questions are answered in as timely and efficient a manner as available resources allow. Public services staff does not provide in-depth research (gathering of comparative data, analysis, etc.), but will instead attempt to locate sources from which patrons can obtain the information they seek.

D. Questions requiring special guidelines

1. School assignments - Patrons are assisted in finding resources to complete assignments, but staff members do not help in completing the actual work (answering algebra questions, outlining plots, etc.). Students with lengthy lists of ready reference questions are asked to come into the library.

2. Ratings and evaluations - Short, easily answered evaluations, a sentence or two, are given over the telephone. Patrons are encouraged to come into the library to compare the information themselves. Under no circumstances will staff provide personal opinions of products or interpret ratings and evaluations for the patron. Staff will also refrain from offering personal opinions on local businesses, politics, schools, and religion.

3. Vehicle price information - Values on used vehicles are never given over the telephone. Patrons are instead directed to printed or online resources listing this information.

4. Art/antique values - Appraisals of antiques, collectibles and the like are never given. Patrons are instead directed to printed or online resources listing this information or to specialists in the field.

5. Medical, legal and consumer information – Additional care and caution will be exercised when providing medical, legal and consumer information. To avoid misunderstandings, which have the potential of causing harm, library staff prefer that patrons visit the library to review this type of information, rather than receiving the information remotely, or that patrons be directed to reliable online resources to view and interpret the information for themselves. Staff will provide definitions, quote material verbatim, and direct patrons to information sources but will not offer advice or options, condense, or abstract information, or
suggest a course of action or diagnosis. Staff will provide the source and copyright date for legal and medical information.

6. Income tax questions - Patrons are assisted in locating specific forms they have requested. Interpretation of the patron’s filing requirements is never offered, and patrons with such requests are referred to the IRS toll-free phone number and website for tax information, the AARP Tax Aide Foundation, and/or other tax guides.

7. Patent/copyright - Patrons are directed to online resources and books on copyright and patent procedures. Patent searches are not provided. Patrons requesting patent searches are referred to service providers in this subject area.

8. Family and local history questions - Patrons interested in family and/or local history are encouraged to come to the library to do their own research or access the library's archival resources remotely. In addition to retrieving files from the archives room, research volunteers and/or staff are available to show patrons the locations and basic techniques needed to do this type of research.

9. Translation - This is not a service provided at Patrick Heath Public Library. Patrons are referred to foreign language materials in the library, online resources, and/or professional service providers in this subject area.

10. Career services - Job-seeking patrons are directed to library materials and online resources that can aid in their searches. Staff is not able to fill out job applications or write resumes, whether online or on paper.

11. Editing - Staff does not critique or edit patron manuscripts or other documents. Referrals will be made as appropriate.

If patrons require more in-depth assistance with reference questions, or a question cannot be adequately addressed in a short amount of time, trained staff members are available for appointments on any number of topical needs from genealogy to school research to technology.
Liability

The library does not guarantee the accuracy of information contained in any materials owned or obtained by the library; neither is the library liable for any consequences or damages the user of materials owned or obtained by the library may suffer based on actions taken or decisions made using information from the library. Further, the library does not guarantee that the source of any information to which a library staff member may direct a user seeking reference or informational assistance is the best possible available source of that information—either in materials that the library owns or is able to obtain from other sources.

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