

Goffstown Public Library Reference Policy

Mission of the Goffstown Public Library

The Goffstown Public Library will serve as a primary resource for community information needs. It will provide a comfortable place for citizens to access quality materials and programs, enhance cultural awareness and to explore issues of local, national and global interest.

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 visitors. 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 visitors in locating accurate answers to their questions through either its own resources or appropriate referrals.
2. The Library will provide its visitors with accurate, up-to-date resources in a variety of formats.
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), reference transactions are "information consultations in which Library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs. Reference transactions do not include formal instruction or exchanges that provide assistance with locations, schedules, equipment, supplies, or policy statements." (Approved by RUSA Board of Directors, January 14, 2008)

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, chat software, and social media. 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 visitors browsing in the vicinity. Staff members will be proactive and approach visitors 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 visitor, 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 visitor. 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 person.

Probing

Use open questions to initiate inquiry and open questions after initial query. Though staff should conduct as thorough a reference interview as possible, they should make sure they don't embarrass the person or invade their privacy when addressing sensitive topics.

Verifying

Paraphrase or repeat the person's question, ask if that is the specific question

Searching

Find answer, accompany the person to sources, report progress, offer referral

Informing

Relay details of located answer, citing source, confirm understanding of answer. If the individual has trouble understanding the preliminary answer, 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 visitors with equal respect, and all questions with equal attention, the manner in which the individual contacts the Library may limit the scope of the reference search.

Telephone, social media, and chat 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 person's name and telephone number or email address and then call or email the person 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 individual to visit the Library for assistance.

Written requests for information received by mail will be acknowledged by the Library staff within one week of its arrival.

Email requests for information will be acknowledged within one business day and answered completely or referred within one week of its arrival.

Request Priority

Reference requests can be made using many methods of communication. Priority will be given to the individual who is in-house over all others making a request. Library staff shall serve in-house patrons on a first come, first served basis. If visitors are waiting they should be informed that they will be assisted in order of arrival and as soon as possible.

Level of Assistance

Library staff will advise patrons of the sources available that will answer their inquiry as well as the location of the sources. Library staff will accompany the visitor 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 individual 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 individual to view, process, and organize the information provided. A reference search may include long distance phone calls, on-line and interlibrary loan if a person 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 individual verbatim and assistance may be given to help a person 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 individuals 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 sources such as other libraries, various types of agencies, or individuals when all our in-house sources have been exhausted.

Reference Collection and Maintenance

Materials will be acquired for the reference collection in accordance with the Library's *Collection Development Policy*.

Other reference materials are updated as funds permit and need is demonstrated. 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 individual. Titles are evaluated on an annual basis by Library staff and additions and deletions are made at this time.

Subscriptions gifted to the Library by members of the community 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* and the *Concord Monitor* are kept for two weeks. Both newspapers and their full text articles are available through online databases. *The Goffstown News* is also accessible in an electronic format and paper copies are not retained for more than four weeks. Most magazines are kept from six months to two years 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 circulate for one week. The newspaper collection does not circulate. There is no limit to magazines borrowed, and cardholders are encouraged to check online sources for the full text of the article they are seeking.

Community Resources

Library staff shall continuously assess community needs, and collecting, and if necessary, creating materials and resources containing information that can't be found elsewhere. Such materials may include cemetery records, local ordinances, emergency management, and policies.

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.

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 visitor ~~patron~~ is inhouse they should be instructed in the use of any sources they may use themselves. Library staff will be available to instruct in house visitors on the use of our electronic resources.

Statistics

Library staff will make a note of each reference question asked in the manner prescribed by Library supervisors. The Library Director will compile statistics on a monthly basis of the number of reference questions asked.

Staff Training

Staff development will be accomplished through scheduled in-house training; workshops and webinars sponsored by reputable organizations, and accredited college reference courses.

Problems or Complaints

Library staff shall refer any problems or difficult situations to a supervisor and/ or the Library Director as necessary.

Approved by Library Board of Trustees 9/21/05

Revised and approved by Library Board of Trustees 1/16/2013, 7/15/2015, 4/18/2018, 2/17/2021

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 respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.
- 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 at the 1939 Midwinter Meeting by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; and January 22, 2008.