

# REFERENCE SERVICES POLICY

Approved March 12, 2015

## I. Definition of Reference Services

Reference service involves providing information to patrons about library use and materials, answering “ready reference” questions, as well as giving guidance for more in-depth research. Reference service is provided to individuals visiting the Reedsburg Public Library as well as via email, written inquiry and by phone. Patrons may ask reference questions at either of the two Circulation stations, the Children’s Desk or the Reference desk. Staff should also be prepared to answer questions as they are working in the stacks, shelving books, weeding or shelf reading. Answers should be given in an objective manner, withholding any personal opinions. Reference questions are confidential and patrons will be treated in a courteous and professional matter regardless of the subject matter or sensitivity of the inquiry presented.

## II. Types of Reference Inquiries

**Directional and Catalog Assistance**, includes providing simple assistance with finding library materials as well as providing reading recommendations as needed. This may also include simple technology assistance such as help with reserving or logging onto a computer.

**“Ready Reference”** questions are those that can be easily answered using library resources, print or electronic. When answering reference questions over the phone, staff should state the source or sources of the information found. These questions should be able to be addressed within 3-5 minutes while others are waiting. For telephone ready reference requests, staff may take the patron’s name and phone number and offer to look into the question and call back at an agreed upon time. While in some cases, staff may be able to spend additional time on a request, in general, inquiries that require additional time should be treated as In-Depth requests as addressed below.

**In-Depth Inquiries** are those inquiries that may require additional time, effort, or consultation with another staff member, library or outside resource. If a walk-in patron has an in-depth question, and the library is busy, library staff may get the patron started with various sources and check on his/her progress as time allows. Reference call-backs may be completed by the staff member taking the inquiry or may be referred to the Reference Services Librarian.

**Research Assistance** is assistance given to patrons in the finding, use and evaluation of sources on their own. Patrons in need of reference assistance may be directed to appropriate print, database and Internet sources for independent work. Staff may instruct the patrons on the use of these sources, but should in no way be expected to do the assignment for the patron. Reference Assistance is limited to the time available. If additional time or more direct assistance is needed, it may be necessary for the patron to schedule an appointment for further assistance.

**Reference By Appointment.** In certain cases, it may be appropriate to schedule an appointment for the patron to work with a staff member for additional assistance with resources. This assistance is available for, but not limited to use of the library’s catalog and databases, local history resources, microfilm equipment as well as computer and electronic device assistance. Appointments are made on an as-needed basis and will be made with appropriate staff as time and resources permit. Staff will attempt to provide referrals to outside organizations or agencies for assistance beyond the libraries available services.

## III. Limitations to Reference Services

Due to the nature of certain reference inquiries and limitation of

time, subject matter and ethical and legal concerns, staff may be unable to provide a suitable answer or solution in some cases. In those cases in which a staff member is unable to provide complete resolution to a reference inquiry, he or she will make every effort to provide the patron with an appropriate referral to an outside resource or agency.

- Library staff may provide mathematical formulas, but will not compute the answers. E.g. Q:“What is the average cost of ABC?” A: “To calculate the average, you would add ABC together and divide by 3”, along with a citation of the operation from an online or print resource.
- For Legal and Medical questions staff may provide definitions or read requested information out of a text or website or direct patrons to appropriate sources for their perusal. Library staff may not interpret or summarize information from resources. For legal and medical inquiries, staff will make every effort to direct patrons to appropriate library resources for their own research, or to appropriate professional agencies or resources.
- Library staff may help a patron to find a requested tax form, but may not recommend which form or forms should be filed or provide assistance on completing the forms.
- Copies are \$.10 per page. In some cases, copies in the course of providing reference help may be provided free of charge as a courtesy.