

Berkeley Public Library

Reference & Readers' Advisory Policy

Introduction

Reference and readers' advisory service is one of the most important functions of the Berkeley Public Library, and covers a wide range of services including research assistance, homework help, computer assistance, bibliographic verification, inter-library loan assistance, and referral services.

The following policy is designed to ensure that all patrons receive the highest possible level of this service.

Goals

The goal of reference and readers' advisory service is to provide accurate answers to library patrons' questions by trained staff members during all hours of operation of the library. This is accomplished by:

- Providing materials and services to meet users' needs for timely, accurate, and useful information.
- Providing trained staff to assist patrons and to facilitate access to the library's collections and cooperative resources.
- Assisting patrons in the use of reference resources, library materials, and in the development of research strategies.
- Providing readers' advisory service.
- Providing efficient referral and effective follow through including interlibrary loan, resource sharing, and supplementary reference services.
- Keeping the community informed about the services and resources available and encouraging their use.

Ethics and Standards

The informational needs of every library patron will be taken seriously and facilitated with objectivity, respect, and confidentiality. Staff does not discriminate based on age, gender, race, sexual preference, disability, or appearance in providing reference services.

Providing advice and suggestions for any reading material (fiction or nonfiction) is an essential service in a public library. Each patron's reading tastes will be taken seriously and without judgement. However, when performing readers' advisory services, personal interpretation and recommendation are unavoidable.

Service is to be provided in a manner consistent with the *Library Bill of Rights*, the *American Library Association Code of Ethics*, and copyright law.

Availability of Service

The Berkeley Public Library provides reference and readers' advisory service to any patron requesting it, regardless of residency. Reference and readers' advisory service is provided by staff during all hours that the library is open. The entire collection (juvenile and adult, circulating and non-circulating) is available to patrons of all ages.

Inquiries for reference and readers' advisory service are accepted in person, by telephone, through the mail, and digitally. Priority is given to in-person requests. Answering inquiries has priority over other staff assignments. If information appropriate to the patron's need is not available in the library, a referral will be made to local or regional resources, inter-library loan, and/or other libraries.

Whenever possible, answers to questions will be provided during the patron's visit or telephone call. When other patrons are waiting, staff may have to limit the initial amount of time spent serving an individual patron but follow-up attention will be given. A longer response time will be negotiated with the patron when staff needs additional time to locate the needed information.

Providing Service

Library staff will use available sources of information to answer questions. This includes, but is not limited to books, periodicals, electronic databases, internet resources, and government agencies. Citations to sources of information will be given when requested.

A staff member's personal opinion will never be given as fact. While staff will provide sources of information, information will not be interpreted and library staff will not offer legal, medical, or tax advice. If it is not possible to answer a question by the above means, questions will be referred to another agency as appropriate.

Staff will assist in guiding patrons doing extensive research or compiling large amounts of information to appropriate sources. Reading and interpretation of materials is solely the responsibility of the patron.

Limitations

- Information, particularly in the subject areas of law, medicine, consumer information, religion, politics, and persons finance/tax information, is presented without interpretation, advice, analysis, or personal recommendation.
- Staff will not engage in conversation or debate of a personal nature, including (but not limited to) religious beliefs, political positions, or personal lives.
- Patrons may not request to work exclusively with a particular staff member.
- Staff set reasonable limits on the amount of time and level of response given to patron requests for information in order to ensure equal and fair access to library services for all patrons.
- When it is not possible to answer a question by traditional means, staff may refer questions to another agency as appropriate.
- Patrons must comply with the Berkeley Public Library *General Policies* when engaging in reference and readers' advisory services.
- Staff does not provide editorial, typing, tutoring, or translation services.

Service to Non Berkeley Public Library Cardholders

The following services are restricted to Berkeley Public Library cardholders only:

- Remote access to databases
- Museum pass program
- Electronic equipment (excluding public PCs)
- Electronic resources (restriction is for remote access only)

Approved by Berkeley Public Library Board of Trustees March 20, 2019

Ayes 5 Nays