EASTTOWN LIBRARY

POLICY AREA: CIRCULATION AND SERVICES

POLICY NAME: REFERENCE & INFORMATION SERVICES

ADOPTED: 12/18/2002

REVISED: 8/28/2024

This document sets forth a policy for the provision of reference and information services at Easttown Library. The guidelines herein serve as a useful tool and are intended to help library staff provide consistent and quality reference service. While this policy attempts to cover most aspects of reference work it does not claim to be an exhaustive treatment and given the rapidly changing nature of reference work should be viewed as a flexible document.

Easttown Library strives to provide reading and learning opportunities while supporting economic and cultural engagement for our community. Providing professional reference help is vital to achieve that mission. Simply defined, reference and information service is the assistance given to someone seeking information.

General Guidelines

Priority of service is given to patrons on site, and on a first come first served basis; at busy times it may be necessary to give some basic help to the patron and get back to them for more assistance. Whenever feasible, promoting information literacy and showing users how to search for information on their own is encouraged. Staff seek to be proactive by anticipating patron needs and accompanying them to the shelves to find materials if desired. Staff endeavors to respond to the customer at his/her level of expertise with the resources available in-house and online.

Questions received via telephone, email or other electronic means, or physical mail will be answered in a timely manner. Phone questions generally should be kept brief, if more time is needed a call back may be necessary or the caller can be encouraged to visit the library. Most questions asked are of a ready reference nature, but occasionally more complex and time intensive requests are made. These extended research questions should be handled on an individual basis, the librarian will determine if the question/search can be undertaken.

When a query is beyond the scope or expertise of the reference department referrals to other libraries, organizations, or authoritative sources may be necessary and it is incumbent upon the librarian to give the patron another option to find their information. Interlibrary Loan (ILL) is a District service provided to all residents and libraries in the county (see ILL policy). All library staff will help individuals with their requests as needed.

Specific Practices

What follows are some common categories of reference questions and how they should be handled. These questions can be problematic and deserve special mention.

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Technology Help

As time allows, staff may provide basic computer use and internet instruction for customers. Customers requiring lengthy assistance using the computer may make an appointment for one-on-one computer help by contacting the Adult Services Department. Patrons requesting this service will be connected with staff based on their needs. One-on-one computer appointments are not guaranteed and are dependent on staff proficiencies and availability. One-on-one appointments are limited to 30 minutes, with a maximum of two appointments per month.

Medical, Legal, Tax, or Finance Questions

Library staff will not provide advice or interpret texts in any specialized areas, including but not limited to the areas of medicine, law, taxes, or finance. They will provide guidance to resources on these subjects and in some cases, give the patron a brief description and/or definition from authoritative in-house and online sources. Specific tax forms and publications will not be suggested.

Confidential Information

To protect the customer's privacy, library staff is prohibited from directly assisting customers with confidential information, such as account passwords, social security numbers, credit card numbers, and electronic banking information.

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