

## **Reference Policy**

The Prendergast Library Reference Desk provides reference services to the community and offers access to quality cultural, educational, and informational materials and services. This includes reference service at all times when the library is open.

Reference service is provided impartially and confidentially to all patrons regardless of age, race, sex, or library cardholder status. The library works to provide timely, accurate, and useful information for all patrons.

### **Reference Services**

Qualified librarians and library associates staff the Reference Desk whenever the library is open to the public. Reference assistance may involve readers' advisory, research and technology assistance, and searches for library materials and resources; the latter may necessitate accompanying the patron to a catalog computer or to other parts of the collection to locate materials or to use special resources.

If several people are waiting for assistance, requests that are brief or that involve minimal staff guidance may be given priority over long or complex questions that require greater amounts of time. 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.

Questions received via telephone, email or other electronic means, or surface mail will be answered in a timely manner. Phone questions generally should be kept to a maximum of fifteen minutes. If more time is needed a call back may be necessary or the caller can be encouraged to visit the library.

Reference questions sent via email should be sent to [reference@prendergastlibrary.org](mailto:reference@prendergastlibrary.org).

Most questions asked of the reference staff 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, and a manager will determine if the question/search can be undertaken. A research fee will be assessed for offsite research exceeding 15 minutes: charges for research are \$15.00 for the first hour of research; \$7.50 for each hour thereafter.

Whenever feasible, promoting information literacy and showing users how to search for information on their own is encouraged. Self-directional services such as web pages, finding aids, instructional brochures and signage are publicly available in the library.

Reference staff may assist patrons in finding information, but will not offer opinions, interpretations, or summaries of that information.

Reference staff preserve the confidentiality of all personal information about its patrons, including the content and nature of a patron's reference question(s).

## Special Situations Regarding Reference Services

**Appraisals:** Assessments of value of rare and used books, works of fine art, antiques, or other artifacts are not offered by reference staff. Staff members use appropriate directories and services to make necessary referrals as stated above.

**Genealogical and microfilm research:** This research for patrons is not conducted by reference staff members. The staff member provides assistance during the patron's search, including instruction in the use of print and electronic sources.

Genealogical research is also available for those who cannot come into the library. If a research request requires less than 15 minutes of staff time, there is no charge. For extended searches, we charge per hour.

**Homework assignments:** The role of the reference staff member is to guide the student to materials or potential sources of information to complete the homework assignment. Every effort is made to instruct the students in the use of appropriate sources. The reference staff does not organize, write, proofread, or solve a student's assignment. Requests that involve extensive research for homework projects are not answered by telephone or electronically.

**Legal, medical, tax, and financial questions:** Patrons are assisted in finding materials and information regarding their legal, medical, tax, and financial questions. Staff members offer no interpretations or summaries of such information, offer no opinions about the patron's situation, and make no recommendations as to appropriate treatments or actions. Staff members may, according to the patron's need, provide referrals to legal and medical directories.

**Library orientations and bibliographic instruction:** Orientations and instructional sessions are offered to groups visiting the library. Groups wishing for a library orientation or for instruction on how to use our resources are asked to contact the library for an appointment to be scheduled.

**Mathematical calculations:** Calculations are not performed for patrons by staff members. Information from mathematical tables and formulas may be provided for the patron's use.

**Technology help:** The library provides computers for patron use and has posted rules and procedures for such use. All reference staff understand these rules and enforce them. Staff members know how to use the library's computers, copiers, and printers, and the software available on them.

Staff will, to the best of their ability and while taking staff time into account, help patrons use our technology and digital resources. However, staff are unable to type or enter information for patrons, complete clerical tasks on behalf of patrons, or offer extended one on one technology assistance.

Alternatively, staff may suggest that patrons needing extended instruction attend computer classes or one on one technology appointments, offered for free by the library.

Staff are unable to provide assistance with patrons' personal devices beyond assisting access to our resources. Staff will not assist with any activities that they know to be or may be illegal (e.g., downloading music, burning DVDs, etc.).

**Translations:** The reference staff does not translate full-text documents, but will provide translations for specific words or phrases as found in foreign language dictionaries.

### **Statistical Data Collection and Evaluation**

Statistics on the number of reference questions and overall reference transactions are kept on an ongoing basis. The statistics are compiled monthly and at the end of the year for state reports. Periodic evaluations of the reference resources and collections (print and electronic) will be done to determine the effectiveness and usefulness of the services offered.