

INFORMATION SERVICES: POLICY & PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

“The mission of the J. V. Fletcher Library is to serve its clientele as a progressive, responsive public library resource, connecting users of all ages with their popular materials needs, without regard to format and serving as an informational center providing materials on the issues and interests of day-to-day living. A strong secondary role is the provision of educational and informational support to students pursuing both formal and informal educational paths. While the Fletcher Library strives to be both reflective of, and responsive to, the community, it also seeks to be in the vanguard of professional library services – attracting and leading the community into informational, cultural and technological literacy in a warm and welcoming public setting.”

(Library Planning Process, 1993).

In support of this mission, the J. V. Fletcher Library aims to provide current, high-demand, high-interest materials in a variety of formats for persons of all ages in the Westford area. Special emphasis is placed on providing timely, accurate and useful information in pursuit of a library user’s job-related, school-related, or personal interests and avocations; and in stimulating young children’s interests and appreciation for reading and learning.

It is the goal of the library that clientele be provided with accurate and timely reference assistance--that all information requests shall be answered promptly, accurately, efficiently and courteously. Information may range from simple answers to practical questions of a factual nature, to answers to complex questions which require considerable research. Local history and genealogy and community information are included in this role. Reference service focuses on the use of a non-circulating reference collection, containing such standard reference tools as dictionaries, encyclopedias, almanacs, directories, bibliographies, indexes, handbooks, vertical files, serials, maps, microforms, electronic databases and the Internet.

PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

The purpose of these guidelines is to assure the consistent delivery of quality information and referral services to all library users. All staff are expected to use their best judgment in situations not addressed in these guidelines.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness in library reference service is dependent on the expertise of library staff in accurately interpreting questions and in using the reference collection, and on the active use of regional reference and interlibrary loan services.

WHO IS SERVED

Access to the J. V. Fletcher Library reference collections and information services is available on an equal basis to users of all ages regardless of place of residence. Service is

provided on-site, by telephone, by telefax, by the Massachusetts Regional Library System van delivery, through on-line searching and by mail.

WHO SERVES

Library staff can be divided into four basic qualification categories: professional, paraprofessional, non-professional adult, and non-professional young adult (high school pages). Reference questions should be handled by the most qualified person on duty at the time. Pages should be encouraged to provide directional assistance to users needing to locate sections or identified items, but should direct any informational requests to more experienced staff.

MANNER IN WHICH USERS ARE SERVED

Public Service Attitude: Qualities of good public service include approachability, sensitivity and courtesy.

Telephone Etiquette: The words, inflection, and tone in answering the telephone should show a willingness to help the caller. **Refer to Customer Service Policy**

Instructing versus Answering Requests: People come to the library for information. It is the librarian's responsibility to give users the choice of either having the information found for them by library staff, or learning how to find it for themselves. No one should be required to learn how to use bibliographies and reference tools, especially to find answers to simple, ready reference questions.

Directing versus Accompanying Users to the Shelf: Whenever possible and/or practical, staff should go with users to the shelf to find materials. When this is not possible, staff should encourage users to return to the desk if they did not find materials.

Overhearing a Colleague Give Misinformation: Users should leave the library with correct information. If a situation arises when staff overhear a colleague give misinformation to a user, they should tactfully offer "newer" information. Some suggested phrases to use are "I have some new information on that..." or "I was just working on that and found..."

REFERENCE PRACTICES

Interview: Sound reference interview techniques should be practiced in negotiating all users' requests, whether the transaction is between library staff and the public, or between library staff and regional interlibrary loan or reference staff. Such techniques involve asking pertinent questions to determine what the patron wants and in what form. This interview process saves time and energy for both staff and user. Some phrases to use are: "Can you tell me a little more about..." "I'm not sure I understand exactly what you want to know about..." "Could you be a little more specific?"

Ready Reference: This service provides for brief factual answers and requires a search of no more than five minutes.

Referral: The J. V. Fletcher Library will make every effort to locate and deliver needed information to the user. Keeping local information files accurate and up-to-date is essential. If there is any question about the accuracy of information, local referrals should be verified prior to giving the information to the user.

Citing Sources Used: The source should always be cited when providing information in response to a request received. If there is concern about how current the information is, the date of the source used should also be given.

Closure Statement: Staff should close a reference transaction by asking users, “Does this completely answer your question?” or “Do you need any more information?” or a similar question. The use of a closure statement will encourage further investigation of a question by the user.

TYPES OF SOURCES AVAILABLE

The J. V. Fletcher Library has a variety of print and non-print sources to respond to user requests. Additional sources and services are available through the Massachusetts Regional Library System, through the sub-regional library in Andover, and at the headquarters library in Boston.

INTERLIBRARY LOANS

Staff should look up needed information in the J. V. Fletcher database to determine whether the item is owned and--if the status is available--whether it is on the shelf. Reserve procedures should then be followed. If an item is not a holding of the J. V. Fletcher Library, the Merrimack Valley Library Consortium (MVLC) database and surrounding databases should be consulted by the interlibrary loan staff via ILL procedures.

INTERLIBRARY LOAN (ILL) POLICY

Interlibrary loan is a service that the J. V. Fletcher Library provides to complement its own collection of books and other media. It is available to all patrons, young and old alike, to encourage their literary curiosity and scholarship. Patrons in good standing are encouraged to use interlibrary loan for securing those items not found within the J. V. Fletcher Library collection. Materials may be ordered via network transfers (from local network members), via the Regional ILL Center (mediated ILL's) or directly from the owning library through EMAIL, fax, or regular United States mail. ~~While there is no limit on network transfers, the Regional ILL Center processes no more than five requests per day per patron. Patrons should be aware that non-book formats, esoteric, unique or scholarly titles may be assessed a fee (cost) by the loaning library; in the case of a fee assessment, the patron will be notified of the potential fee and given the opportunity to indicate if the J. V. Fletcher Library should proceed with the request. Any fee assessed will be payable directly to the loaning library, per their policy.~~ All possible effort will be made to accommodate our patrons' requests, although best sellers or new (current year) items may be more difficult to obtain.

PATRON REQUESTS FOR SPECIALIZED INFORMATION

Assignment-related Questions: Telephone questions involving school assignments will receive the same time and attention as other ready-reference questions. Further assistance will be given provided it does not obviously defeat the intent of the assignment. Students coming into the library will receive the same reference service as any other user.

City/Criss-Cross Directories: The policy of the Information Services Department regarding requests for information about Westord residents (“criss-cross” or name and address requests) will be that this information will not be given out over the telephone; the sources for this type of information may be used on site only and will be made readily available to those requesting it.

Contest and Puzzle Questions: Questions involving contests and puzzles will receive the same time and attention as other ready-reference questions. Patrons coming into the library will be shown likely sources for further information.

Consumer Information: For telephone inquiries, information read will be brief and should include the date of the information and the specific product or model described or tested. The user should be encouraged to come to the library to examine the full report for information on all the products being rated. Recommendations and/or value judgments should not be made for any item.

Community Information: The J. V. Fletcher Library is a major resource for the dissemination of community information through continually updated files containing contact persons, addresses, telephone numbers, etc. of local agencies, clubs, organizations, local officials, town services, etc. Before referrals are made to a local or national agency, the library should call them first to verify the currency of the information. The Community bulletin board should also be updated as needed.

Genealogical Information: Ready-reference questions will be handled by telephone. Users should come to the library or use interlibrary loan to obtain further information. Staff members will provide general assistance with the resources of the library local history and genealogy collection; however, they should not engage in genealogical research. [Please see the Access to Special Collections Policy]

Legal Information: Legal questions will be treated like any other reference question provided that they do not require legal advice or interpretation. Patrons should be informed of resources such as Massachusetts General Laws Annotated and the United States Code Annotated. Further referral may be made to sources such as the sub-regional library in Andover and to the Law Library in Lowell.

Tax Information: The library participates annually in the tax form distribution program. Specific tax questions will be treated as any other reference question. Patrons will be informed, as appropriate, of all relevant local resources. Further referral may be

made to appropriate state and federal tax offices. Tax advice or interpretation is not given.

Medical Information: For telephone inquiries, correct spellings, brief dictionary or descriptions from published sources are provided. These sources will be quoted verbatim with sources and date cited. Staff do not provide medical advice, interpretation, evaluation, or assistance in self-diagnosis. Drug information will not be made on the telephone based on physical description. Patrons should be encouraged to contact their physicians, pharmacists, or other health professionals.

Obituaries: The time involved in locating information from obituaries varies according to format and time period. If the information can be found quickly, it should be read over the telephone or a callback offered. The information may also be requested through interlibrary loan.

APPROPRIATE PUBLIC BEHAVIOR

Food: To protect the resources of the J. V. Fletcher Library from accident or abuse, there can be no food, drink or smoking materials in the reference or other public service areas.

Quiet: To assure that the reference and other reading areas of the library are places where study and research can take place, staff must require users exercise restraint in talking and other noise-generating activities.

[See the Code of Conduct Policy for specifics on patron behavior]

Usage of Equipment: To ensure fair and equal access to equipment, researchers are asked to abide by the requests of the Information Services staff and the specifics of Library policies in sharing and using Reference equipment.

Statistics: The public should be aware that a statistical record of the quantity of questions and transactions at the Information Services desk is kept, and at times a zip code or phone area code may be requested to survey breadth of usership. All actual questions and transactions are confidential.

Special Circulation Arrangements: Under unique emergency situations, the Head of Information Services or Information Services desk staff may allow special circulation of Reference items.

See Related Policies:

Internet Access Policy and Guidelines

Special Collections Care, Access and Usage

Requests for Information About Westford Residents

Code of Conduct

Customer Services Policy

VOTED AND APPROVED BY THE LIBRARY TRUSTEES: 11/3/97; 12/2/02; 5/3/04.