100-04 — Reference Service Guidelines

Statement of Purpose

The Fairport Public Library will strive to provide assistance to patrons and access to accurate information or materials in response to user requests in an efficient, courteous, impartial, and timely manner.

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that all users of the Fairport Public Library receive the same levels of service based on uniform procedures and to provide a basis for training and evaluating staff performance.

Reference service is defined in this document as personal assistance provided to users and potential users of information. Reference service takes a variety of forms including direct personal assistance, directories or signs, exchange of information culled from a reference source, readers' advisory assistance, dissemination of information in anticipation of user needs or interests, and direct end-user access to an information system via hardware and software.

The Library will provide service regardless of race, color, creed, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, national origin or citizenship status, physical or mental disability, age, veteran status, military status, or sexual orientation.

Goals of Reference Service

The Fairport Public Library recognizes the following goals for reference service:

1. To provide accurate, courteous, and timely answers to information requests using resources available at or through the library.
2. To assist patrons in the use of library resources and in the development of research strategies.
3. To provide efficient referral and effective follow-through on questions that cannot be answered adequately at this library.

Availability of Service

Library patrons will have access to personal reference services whenever the library is open. At least one professional librarian will always be on duty. Answering reference questions will have priority over other staff assignments. Simultaneous requests will be managed at the librarian's discretion with regard to urgency, complexity, and availability of staff resources. Reference services or time spent completing a request on behalf of any one patron may necessarily be limited to ensure equal access for all library users. If the librarians cannot answer a request immediately, they will obtain contact information from the patron and see that the patron receives a response within a timely manner. The Library offers access to online databases, provided by the New York State Library, Monroe County Library System, and Fairport Public Library. Most online databases can be accessed remotely, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Databases for which the Fairport Public Library subscribes to are only available to residents of Fairport and Perinton.

Resources

Reference staff will use a variety of available resources from reputable sources to give the most accurate and authoritative answers to questions. This will include but not be limited to books, periodicals, online sources, other libraries, and agencies. The library's reference collection is essential to the provision of reference services and therefore is not available for circulation. The librarian will decide when all reasonable resources have been exhausted at this library and when it is appropriate to refer the question to another library or agency.

Forms of Inquiry

Reference service will be provided in response to all forms of inquiry, including requests made in-person and those that come by telephone, chat, mail, or e-mail. To provide the most accurate response possible, personal follow-up with patrons may be initiated by library staff if inquiries are received by chat, mail, or e-mail. Inquiries are answered in the form the librarian feels is the most expedient.

Response to Questions

An effort will be made to answer all types of questions. Distinctions are not made regarding the purpose of the inquiry or the use of the information. Requests will generally be handled in the order in which they are received. Requests submitted by patrons in the library are given priority over telephone requests. When answering a patron's reference question(s), staff will cite the resource(s) from which the information is obtained. The producer of any resource, not the library itself, is responsible for that resource's accuracy.

If answering a particular reference question requires extensive research, interpretation or evaluation of information, the patron will be asked to review and evaluate the resources themselves. In such instances, staff will provide research guidance and instruction in the use of library resources. Staff will offer no interpretation or advice in any area other than library science.

Fees

Fees are not charged for reference service. The library will, however, generally pass on to the patron charges assessed by other libraries or agencies and the costs incurred for providing photocopies and printouts. The patron will be notified in advance of any such charges.

Ethics and Standards

Fairport Public Library subscribes to the principles described in the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association (**Appendix A**). All transactions with patrons and all patron records will be kept confidential as prescribed in New York Civil Practice Law and Rules, Section 4509 (**Appendix B**), and applicable federal law.

Evaluation of Reference Service and Review of the Guidelines

Reference services staff will continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of reference services on an informal basis. Suggestions from the public are always welcome. These guidelines will be reviewed and revised as times and circumstances require.

Adopted: May 13, 2003
Reviewed:
Revised: January 12, 2021; March 10, 2026

Appendix A — Code of Ethics of the American Library Association

As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professionals providing information services, library trustees and library staffs.

Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict. The American Library Association Code of Ethics states the values to which we are committed and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in this changing information environment.

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.

I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired, or transmitted.
IV. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.
V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of coworkers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Adopted at the 1939 Midwinter Meeting by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; and January 22, 2008.

Appendix B — New York Civil Practice Law and Rules, §4509

Library records, which contain names or other personally identifying details regarding the users of public, free association, school, college and university libraries and library systems of this state, including but not limited to records related to the circulation of library materials, computer database searches, interlibrary loan transactions, reference queries, requests for photocopies of library materials, title reserve requests, or the use of audio-visual materials, films or records, shall be confidential and shall not be disclosed except that such records may be disclosed to the extent necessary for the proper operation of such library and shall be disclosed upon request or consent of the user or pursuant to subpoena, court order or where otherwise required by statute.