

INF-1**PRIORITIES FOR INFORMATION ASSISTANCE****POLICY STATEMENT**

In support of its mission and goals, Manhattan Public Library serves the community by providing excellent service with a responsive and knowledgeable staff and high quality information resources for library users of all ages.

DEFINITION

A request for information assistance is one that involves the knowledge, use, recommendations, interpretation or instruction in the use of one or more information sources by a member of the library staff. The term includes information and referral service. Information sources include print and non-print material, electronic databases, the library's catalog, and other libraries and institutions. Information service takes a variety of forms, including:

- Direct personal assistance in using the library, its catalog, collections, resources and services;
- Maintenance of high-quality information resources and collections in a variety of formats;
- Location of information from a variety of sources in response to patron queries in person, in writing, by phone, via e-mail, and chat/text;
- Reader's advisory services;
- Guidance in locating resources;
- Access to community and governmental information;
- Access to electronic information resources.

REGULATIONS

1. Service to the public has priority over all other library tasks. Excellent customer service is the primary purpose of the library.
2. Library staff provides instruction and assistance in the effective use of the library, including individual and group instruction on the use of library resources for information seekers. This includes the catalog, print materials, online resources, and use of technology. Library staff assists patrons in locating materials and/or resources with which they can conduct their own research. Staff limitations and time constraints will not allow library staff to do in-depth research.
3. The library maintains and organizes a collection of information resources that will satisfy diverse user needs through content, currency, format and accessibility.

4. Information resources and services will be provided in the available formats and manner that is most useful to its patrons. These resources and services will take into account the information-seeking behaviors, the information needs, and the service expectations of the community, as well as the best use of public funds.
5. Information service includes providing community information and referral services to local and regional services, resources and organizations.
6. All transactions will be handled with confidentiality. Patrons and their questions and requests will not be discussed beyond a professional context. The library will not disclose personally identifiable information about individual patrons to any requester unless required to do so by law and only under very specific circumstances as outlined in Policy MNG-1, Privacy and Confidentiality.
7. Library staff will avoid giving personal opinions, philosophy, or evaluations of information, ideas, or issues; rather they should rely upon information obtained from reputable sources. Library staff should be ready to cite the source of an answer.
8. Statistics are collected biannually by all public service departments to evaluate information service.
9. Patron comments, suggestions, or dissatisfaction about information service should be directed to the Assistant Director of Public Services.
10. Regulations for handling specific types of questions:
 - a. Genealogy Searches –Library staff do not do genealogy research, but can provide general assistance in locating items in the collection and can direct patrons to other resources and agencies for genealogical information and assistance.
 - b. Newspaper Searches – Time constraints and the press of other duties do not permit library staff to do in-depth, comprehensive newspaper searches. Searches will be limited to location of news items or articles for which patrons can provide a written request (maximum three searches per request) and specify a time frame of one to two months in a given year. The patron will be provided, in person, by mail, or via email with one copy of the results of such searches. There is no fee charged for this service.
 - c. Homework Help – Homework assignments are intended to be a learning experience for the student. Library staff will not locate answers to specific homework questions, but will help students find resource material or potential sources of information so that the students will be able to complete

homework assignments or class projects on their own. Staff will not perform mathematical calculations for patrons, but may read from tables and other information resources.

- d. Medical and Legal Questions – Library staff will never provide advice or interpretation in the areas of medicine or law, including tax law. Staff will limit their assistance to reading factual definitions or descriptions verbatim from authoritative sources, or directing patrons to information resources. Staff should not provide advice in the interpretation of tax law or assistance in the selection of appropriate forms.
- e. Contest Questions – Library staff will answer short, factual questions for patrons for puzzles or contests. Staff will not conduct lengthy searches in these cases nor can they interpret contest rules or trick questions.
- f. Antiques, Art, and Book Appraisals – Library staff are not qualified to make appraisals of the value of books, works of art, antiques, coins, stamps, currency, or other collectibles. Staff will refer patrons to appropriate resources when available.
- g. Consumer Evaluations – Library staff should help patrons locate objective product information by showing them how to use consumer magazines, databases, buying guides, and/or general indexes that may lead to product evaluations in other sources. Staff cannot fill requests for stock quotations, but can direct patrons to the necessary resources.
- h. Compilations and Literature Searches – Library staff cannot prepare extensive research compilations (bibliographies, lists, statistics, etc.,) for patrons, nor can they undertake exhaustive literature searches. Staff instead should offer to assist patrons in doing their own research.

PROCEDURES

1. In order to assure library patrons and staff access to information resources at all times the library is open, certain materials will not circulate. Under unusual circumstances, exceptions to this will be made, on a case-by-case basis, at the discretion of the Assistant Director of Public Services based on the material and demand.
2. Staff at the public service desks will maintain an alert, welcoming, and visibly approachable attitude. Staff should not appear too busy to be interrupted.
3. All inquiries will be handled courteously. Staff at public service desks will make no value judgments as to the importance of any question or request.

4. Simultaneous requests will be managed at the librarian's discretion with regard to urgency, complexity, and availability of staff resources. If the librarian cannot answer a request immediately, he or she will obtain contact information from the patron and see that the patron receives a response within twenty-four hours, or in the case of requests involving microfilm searches, within forty-eight hours.
5. In-person, telephone, and chat/text questions will take priority and will be handled in the order they are received. Postal mail and e-mail requests will rank second in priority and will be handled in the most efficient and timely manner possible.
6. Library staff will never refer patrons to individual practitioners – physicians, attorneys, mental health professionals, financial service providers, or others.
7. If library staff are not able to answer the question to the patron's satisfaction with the library's resources, staff may:
 - a. Obtain materials through interlibrary loan
 - b. Contact other agencies or organizations for resources or information
 - c. Direct the patron to other resources or agencies outside the library
8. When patrons request items that the library does not own, librarians should:
 - a. Offer the patron the opportunity to request that the library purchase the item (in the case of items that are recently published)
 - b. Offer to try to obtain the items through interlibrary loan (in the case of older items)

Guidelines

1. When information is not immediately useful as presented in its source, library staff will add value to that information by various means, including sorting or filing, re-packaging, indexing, annotating, and so on.
2. Before referring patrons to other agencies or libraries to find information, library staff should verify that the materials are at that agency and available. Provide the name, address, and telephone number of the agency to the customer and encourage them to call ahead before traveling to the agency.