

Lewis & Clark Library System Reference Policy

Introduction

The System's support of reference is through the provision of continuing education and training activities, the sponsoring of a reference interest group, and being a facilitator of virtual reference.

Reference service has experienced an enormous change during the past few years. The local library's provision of quality reference to patrons has been aided by the accessibility to fax machines, shared electronic databases, resource sharing, staff training, and the Internet. Because of the impact of this evolution, many libraries are restructuring their reference collection to include print and non-print resources, and redesigning their budgets to include reference telecommunication costs.

Member libraries are encouraged to participate in electronic reference lists and virtual reference programs to assist others and themselves in answering reference questions. The System provides opportunities for reference-related continuing education in addition to sponsoring the SWIRL e-list.

Responsibilities of the Lewis & Clark Library System

- The System assists member libraries in meeting local responsibilities and requirements as defined in the System's Reference Policy.
- The System provides opportunities for member libraries to participate in reference-related continuing education and training. These opportunities include, but are not limited to, workshops, informational packets, training sessions, newsletters, readers' advisory service, and SWIRL.
- The System works with the reference interest group, SWIRL, in the development of programs and activities.
- The System investigates the availability of additional electronic resources for the members.

Responsibilities of the Member Libraries

- The local library is responsible for providing reference services to its patrons.
- The local library develops, adopts, and revises a reference policy.
- The local library budgets for reference service to its patrons.

- The local library is responsible for staff attendance at appropriate continuing education and training activities relating to reference work.
- The local library evaluates its collection to meet the needs of local patrons. Appendix A - Recommended Basic Reference Resources -- contains several lists of recommended resources.
- The local library is encouraged to participate in the statewide Reference Recycling Project sponsored by the Public Library and Reference Services Forums of the Illinois Library Association. This project coordinates the sharing of recently updated reference material with other libraries. More information is at <http://www.shawls.lib.il.us/docs/infoservices/refrec-index.html>
- The local library collects and distributes appropriate reference statistics to its board, staff, patrons, and System. See Appendix B for an example.
- The local library is familiar with the appropriate library standards applicable to its type of library in regards to reference service.

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Appendix A – Recommended Basic Reference Resources

The *Standards for the Services of Illinois Multitype Library Systems* requires the systems to provide their members with lists of recommended reference resources. Member libraries are encouraged to use the reference resource lists developed by the Shawnee Library System and/or the Suburban Library System as a guide for selecting reference resources. The *Recommended Reference Sources* as posted on the Shawnee Library System’s web site at <http://www.shawls.lib.il.us/docs/infoservices/refsource.html>. Suburban’s core lists are posted at <http://www.sls.lib.il.us/reference/standcore/index.html#core>

The physical format of the resources is a local decision. The library may decide to purchase the resources in print or electronic format, or may decide to use Internet access. The local library should choose the appropriate categories to match the library’s mission, philosophy of service, and patron needs.

Appendix B – Statistical Collection

Many libraries collect reference statistics to help determine usage, types of questions, format of questions, and staff training needs. Some libraries collect statistics on a daily basis; others track for defined timeframes throughout the year. It is recommended that, at a minimum, statistics be collected twice a year, for a week during April and October.

In order for the statistics to be accurate and meaningful, they must be collected in a consistent manner. The library staff must completely understand the library’s definition of a reference question, and the difference between a directional and an informational question. Before beginning statistical collection, the library’s in-house definitions should be reviewed with the library staff.

Data collection examples:

Number of questions:

Number of reference questions
Number of directional questions
Number of questions from adults
Number of questions from juveniles

Format of questions:

In-person
Telephone
E-mail
Fax
Live chat
Other

Resources used to answer question:

Reference collection
Library collection
FirstSearch
Electronic databases
Internet
Other