

Bucks County Free Library

Information and Group Services

Reference Services Policy

Policy Statement

The Bucks County Free Library endeavors to provide accurate reference services in response to requests from library users in an efficient, courteous, and timely manner. Consistent with the principles expressed in the American Library Association's Code of Ethics and Library Bill of Rights, reference services will be delivered free of personal beliefs and bias. As outlined in BCFL's Privacy and Confidentiality of Library Records policy, reference interactions are confidential. Library staff may consult with each other when necessary to serve the patron or consult with staff at other libraries, agencies, and organizations.

Regulations

Reference services available through the Library generally include information services, item requests, interlibrary loan, instruction on the use of the library and library resources, readers' advisory, referral to community services, and local tourism information.

Librarians and/or trained library staff are available at all times the library is open to provide reference services in this order of priority:

- Queries from persons present in the library
- Queries from persons contacting the library via telephone
- Queries submitted via other means of communication such as chat, email, social media, post mail, etc.

Staff shall obtain reference training as needed and should be acquainted with the local reference collection as well as the databases available through the BCFL website and PA Power Library.

Staff members will distinguish between their own personal convictions and professional duties and shall not allow their personal beliefs to interfere with providing access to information resources. Staff will provide information without judging its moral or aesthetic worth. Even if requested, staff opinions or interpretations are not given as fact. Staff shall not offer their personal views on politics, religion, social issues, etc. to the public.

The Bucks County Free Library may collaborate with other libraries across the state, country, and world to field and respond to reference questions that are received virtually.

The Library may establish guidelines to ensure that patrons receive fair and equal access to this service within the limitations of staff time and resources.

The Library disclaims any liability or responsibility arising from using the Library's reference services.

Information Services

Staff will respond to all information requests, providing information from accurate print and nonprint resources or a reliable authority. Staff will provide the title of the source, the author (if applicable), and the date of publication for resources used to answer the question.

Library staff will provide basic research assistance as needed by guiding and referring patrons to resources that answer their queries. All staff are trained to provide ready-reference assistance. For longer queries or more detailed reference help, staff may refer patrons to a librarian or manager on site for the best service. Lengthy searches and extensive research that requires selection of appropriate materials, interpretation of data and sources, or analysis of information (i.e. genealogical research) will be performed directly by the patron.

Telephone and virtual reference service are for short, factual questions. Detailed information will not be relayed over the phone. Instead, available materials can be gathered and held for patron pickup. Telephone reference questions that require more than a couple of minutes to answer, due to the nature of the question or other patrons waiting in the library, will be handled as callbacks by professional staff.

Additional care and caution will be exercised when providing legal, medical, or consumer information. This includes all income tax queries. Whenever possible, it is advisable that patrons visit the library to review this type of information. Staff should read verbatim the information requested and cite the source (including publication date). Again, staff will not offer advice or opinions, condense or abstract information, or suggest a course of action or diagnosis.

With regard to homework, staff will help a student locate information but not directly do the assignment.

Items Requested

When a patron seeks a known title, staff will use the process of bibliographic verification to determine whether our library owns it. If the library owns it, staff will either assist the patron in locating it on the shelf or assist the patron in placing a hold on the item using library catalog. Otherwise, staff will consider requesting the items through suggest a purchase/interlibrary loan.

If a patron has a partial citation for a title, staff will make a reasonable effort to verify the citation using standard reference resources.

Instruction

Staff provide patrons with instruction and assistance in basic use and evaluation of print and online materials as well as other library resources and services.

Staff will assist patrons with basic computer questions, depending on staff availability; however, staff cannot offer technical help (fixing hardware, crashed systems, etc.) or in-depth training. Ten to fifteen minutes is a reasonable time to assist with computer questions. For more extended technology assistance in using basic technology, the library's online databases and other resources, patrons can schedule an appointment (up to 30 minutes) for technology help. Staff is limited in their ability to assist individuals in solving problems with their personal computer or devices.

Staff members are not authorized to make purchases for or act as intermediary between patron and the marketplace (i.e., online shopping). In no case may a staff member be given a person's personal credentials such as username, password, or credit card information. For privacy reasons, staff cannot fill out online forms, type in login information, or compose personal documents for patrons.

Reader's Advisory

Staff will provide reader's advisory services including reading recommendations based on the patron and staff's established criteria. Staff will make recommendations without personal bias. Passive reader's advisory services available at the library include booklists, displays, bestseller lists, genre labels, and shelf arrangement.

Referrals

If requested information is unavailable via the Bucks County Free Library, library staff will refer patrons to other libraries, agencies, or organizations for further assistance.

Common referrals include the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Library of Accessible Media for Pennsylvania (LAMP), and regional institutions.

Tourism Information

Libraries are a valuable resource for tourism information. Staff can assist patrons with finding information about the local history, culture, and attractions found in Bucks County.

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