

REFERENCE SERVICES POLICY DRAFT

Approved by the Library Board on 1/15/2025

North Valley Public Library strives to provide accurate and timely information. The Library provides reference service to people present in the library, via telephone, and email.

Library staff are on duty all hours the Library is open to help patrons with questions. All patrons receive fair and equal access to this service within the limitations of staff time and resources. Patrons may request that their questions be answered by the Director when available.

Staff treat all reference requests with respect and confidentiality, to the extent authorized by law.

Staff may decline any reference request if the request is intended to or has the effect of harassment.

Library staff use reputable sources of information to answer questions. This includes, but is not limited to books, electronic databases, internet resources compiled by professionals in the field, and government agencies. Exhaustive or lengthy research is not available, although staff make every effort to assist in guiding patrons compiling varying degrees of information to appropriate sources. Before responding to a reference request, staff must understand the question entirely.

When answering specific information questions, staff will cite the source of the answer. Personal beliefs, opinions, and experience are not acceptable sources of answers to reference questions. Staff must not offer advice, interpretation, recommendation, opinion or personal experience. This includes, but is not limited to legal, medical, tax, financial, political, or religious advice. The staff may suggest that the patron contacts an attorney or medical practitioner, an appropriate government agency or nonprofit organization, or other libraries for assistance.

Staff will confirm that the information meets the patron's needs.

Medical Financial and Legal Questions

Staff may not provide medical, legal, copyright, financial, or tax advice. Library staff can help patrons find books, search databases, and direct them to vetted websites without advice or interpretation. Staff may not recommend individual practitioners such as physicians or attorneys.

Taxes

Information on taxes is provided from published materials or websites, not from personal experience of the staff. Staff will assist patrons to the IRS website. Tax advice is not given, including recommendation of forms.

Values & Appraisals

Staff may not provide appraisals of books, artwork, antiques, or other collectibles.

Genealogy Research & other in-depth research

Genealogical, patent, trademark, or other in-depth research services are not provided. Missoula public library offers genealogy classes.

Consumer Information

Staff will direct patrons to objective product information but may not interpret results of consumer research or offer personal recommendations.

Staff will not:

- Provide proofreading, editorial or translation services

- Provide career counseling advice
- Provide typing services
- Handle confidential information such as social security numbers, bank information, account information, or medical information.
- Create accounts for patrons, such as personal email, social media, banking, financial or online shopping accounts. Staff may train and assist patrons but must look away as passwords and confidential information is entered.
- Serve as an intermediary between the patron and other individuals or organizations.
- Open any password protected apps for the patron.

Technology Assistance on patron's device

Library staff can help patrons learn to use their own computer, phones, pads, but staff cannot repair or fix devices. It is ideal if the patron is the only one handling their device but sometimes it is most effective if staff handle the device. In such cases:

- Staff should always ask permission before handling a device.
- Through the whole training session, the device screen should be visible to the patron, so they see what you are doing.
- Staff members should be clear on every action and ask permission, such as opening settings to find the wi-fi network.
- Staff should always ask permission before making setting changes and inform patrons fully what the change will do.

Patrons should be aware that if patrons provide staff with their devices, library staff are not responsible for any damage.

Library staff can provide brief assistance with special interest internet searches such as social networking, shopping, or personal interest websites but are not able to engage in lengthy or prolonged guidance. Patrons will be given a brief overview to the resources available so the patron can conduct their own research.

When staff makes the determination that the nature of the request is beyond the scope of the Library's reference mission or abilities, the staff member shall endeavor to direct the patron to appropriate resources.

The Library disclaims any liability or responsibility arising from use of the Library's reference services, and any information provided.