



Queensland Public Library Standards and Guidelines

Reference Services Standard

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9 Reference Services Standard

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- 9.1 Objective
- 9.2 Standard
- 9.3 Guidelines
- 9.4 Performance Indicators
- 9.5 Definitions

9.1 Objective

To provide standards and guidelines for the delivery of effective reference and information services to the community and the collection and management of suitable resources to support these services.

9.2 Reference Services Standard

9.2.1 Standard for reference and information services

Reference and information services should be available to all members of the community from all library service points and across all opening hours. Services should include assistance to clients in the location and use of reference and information resources of the library, whether available onsite or online. Where possible, consideration should be given to extending reference services outside opening hours via online access (see 9.3.1).

Free access to information resources on the Internet should be available to all clients, as well as the provision of instruction in their use. In addition to using its own resources, the library should provide access to information provided by other libraries or networks, as appropriate. For example, the library should subscribe to online databases or utilise networked databases where available to offer the widest range of resources possible.

9.2.2 Standard for reference resources

The selection and management of the library's reference and information resources should be specifically described in the Collection Development Policy. Library resources should be selected from authoritative sources using standard criteria, and objective assessment of web based information should be carefully undertaken. Special attention should be given to the selection of material of relevance to people living in Australia.

Resources should be collected in the most appropriate format to ensure accuracy and currency of information. While most libraries will retain a collection of core reference materials for use within the library, the size of these print collections will reduce as the availability of more easily updated online resources continues to grow. To ensure their continued availability, reference resources should not be available for loan, and should be clearly labeled as such. Reference collections may be housed separately or interfiled with non-fiction collections, with the decision on their location made after considering issues such as ease and speed of access to resources, overall size of the library and its collections and availability of reference staff.

Reference and information resources and collections, including use of electronic databases, should be evaluated regularly to ensure their currency and capacity to meet changing community needs. This evaluation should include feedback from staff using the resources in the delivery of reference services. Out of date resources should be promptly removed to avoid exposure to inaccurate information.

For information on core reference resources, see 9.3.2.

9.2.3 Standard for staff management

Reference and information services should be provided by suitably trained and qualified staff, preferably librarians or library technicians. Well developed skills are required in client service, reference questioning techniques, location and evaluation of information and resources, and technical competence in the use of electronic and multimedia resources. Staff should have a very good awareness of the library's resources and those available elsewhere in the community. They should also have the ability to assist clients to build their own information literacy and skills in the use of information technology e.g. use of computers, email. Skills should be regularly updated through refresher training and instruction in any new resources.

Suitably trained reference staff should be available to assist clients across library opening hours. As staffing levels may sometimes preclude this, all client service staff should have basic training in the above skills and a good knowledge of the library service's resources. Where a library service offers virtual reference services (see 9.3.1), either directly or through collaboration with other libraries, enquiries should be handled by suitably qualified staff.

9.3 Guidelines

9.3.1 Guidelines for web based services

Reference services should reflect the widespread take-up and increasingly sophisticated use of web based resources in the general community. To ensure access to the widest possible range of information and to offer services which can be accessed remotely, libraries should consider the inclusion of web based reference services.

These services may include:

- information on the library web site about its reference and information services;
- an email, SMS or chat based enquiry service, possibly offered collaboratively with other library services;
- remote access for library members to online databases, supported either directly by the library service or via a consortia subscription or network arrangement (such as those offered by the State Library of Queensland);
- FAQ services where frequently asked reference questions and suitable responses are listed or "canned" on web pages, saving time for both clients and staff.

9.3.2 Guidelines for reference resources

While the composition of each library's collection will differ, the following is a guide to resources considered essential for any public library.

To ensure an adequate core collection of reference and information resources, both print and electronic resources should be included. Where the currency of information is critical, online formats are preferred. Electronic resources are also more easily accessible in all branches of a library service. Where print titles have been replaced with electronic ones, the library's catalogue should continue to include records of the titles.

As the proportion of electronic resources held by a library service grows, so does its obligation to provide assistance and/or training in their use. Wherever feasible, consideration should also be given to the provision of electronic discovery and access tools such as federated searching.

Core print resources should include:

- atlases;
- local and regional street directories;

- dictionaries, including language and subject specific titles;
- general encyclopedias;
- local newspapers;
- specialist material of local interest.

Core electronic resources should include:

- electronic databases covering a range of subject areas;
- core statistical material;
- state and national newspapers;
- telephone directories;
- government directories;
- relevant legislation and statutes;
- relevant yearbooks and almanacs;
- electronic journals and e-books.

9.3.3 Guidelines for client assistance

Library staff should offer assistance to clients in the use of the library's catalogue and all its resources. Assisting clients to locate and use resources within the library and answering enquiries directly for clients continue to be important roles for staff. However, there is an increasing need to assist clients in accessing online information and to help them to develop skills in its assessment. The provision of tools that enable self-service in these areas is an important component in this. Staff should be aware of the varying information literacy levels within the community and provide assistance to individual clients accordingly.

Staff should always be objective and impartial in assisting clients and should maintain confidentiality at all times. They should not interpret information or offer judgment or advice, particularly regarding legal or medical information. Technical assistance should be readily given in the use of online and multimedia resources.

Guides, programs and training should be developed as appropriate and offered regularly to assist in the use of resources, particularly web based resources and databases, and to support the growth of information literacy in the community.

9.3.4 Guidelines for reference service facilities

Wherever possible, reference and information services should be offered from a dedicated and clearly signed area of the library, preferably including an enquiry desk. Libraries may wish to consider having clearly identifiable reference staff roving the library to assist clients. The area should be suitably equipped for study and research with computers, printers, and access to photocopier/s and facilities for the use of any multimedia resources. For further information on facility and technology requirements, refer to the Library Buildings Standard and the Technology Standard.
<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/info/publib/policy/guidelines>.

9.4 Performance Indicators

- Reference and information services are available across opening hours
- Adequate training and instruction are provided to clients in the use of print and electronic information resources
- Reference resources are current, authoritative, meet client needs and cover essential requirements
- Reference services are provided by suitably trained and qualified staff who undergo regular training and development
- Facilities provided for study and research purposes meet the Library Buildings and Technology Standards.

9.5 Definitions

Federated searching: the simultaneous search of multiple online databases or web resources. It is an emerging feature of automated, web-based library and information retrieval systems.

Reference and information resources: resources in various formats (print, electronic, multimedia) used to provide information readily to library clients. Print and multimedia reference resources are usually kept in separate collections which are not available for loan, to ensure their availability at all times.

Reference and information services: assistance provided by library staff to clients seeking information. This may include direction and advice on library resources and services, assistance in use of the library catalogue and resources (whether print or electronic), assistance in finding factual information, assistance in locating reading material or referral to other agencies.

Virtual reference services: the remote delivery of reference services, usually by email, SMS or online chat, for use by clients not physically visiting the library or outside of opening hours. These services may include directly answering queries, referral to other agencies or the listing of possible materials. Libraries may offer these services independently, although it is common to collaborate with other library services to share the workload and resources.