

Metropolitan Library System

Burr Ridge, IL

Statement of Reference Guidelines

In accordance with its commitment to high quality information service, the MLS Reference Advisory Committee developed the MLS Statement of Reference Guidelines for member libraries. The committee consists of twelve reference librarians and administrators representing academic, public, school, and special libraries. These guidelines were developed to reflect the multitype nature of the Metropolitan Library System, and to provide a uniform guide for all system reference librarians.

The document is divided into four sections:

- A. MLS Reference Vision
- B. Institutional Guidelines
- C. Professional Guidelines
- D. Service Guidelines

A. MLS Reference Vision

MLS, a multi-type library system, supports the integrity of the library profession by supporting member libraries' reference and information services through continuing education, staff development, and member library collaboration.

B. Institutional Guidelines

I. Evaluation

Goal: An institution provides some means of measuring how well it is meeting the needs of its users.

- Determine the user population.
- Communicate with the users to determine their primary needs.
- Create a means of determining how well the institution is meeting the user's needs.
- Document the needs of the users.

- Reevaluate user needs as necessary, or as mandated by the institution's Long-Range or Strategic Plan.

II. Access

Goal: An institution makes its collection and services available to its users regardless of physical ability or skill level.

- Maintain a physical or virtual presence that is accessible to all users of the institution.
- Provide equipment that meets the minimum technical requirements for accessing electronic resources.
- Offer assistance and instruction for the use of all resources provided by the institution.

III. Marketing

Goal: An institution actively promotes its services, activities, and materials through the means that will best reach its users.

- Determine best practices for informing users about the institution's activities.
- Alert users to service changes or new services in a timely manner.
- Provide users with multiple venues for learning about new and ongoing services.

IV. Collection

Goal: An institution provides resources, both print and electronic, that will best meet the needs of its users.

- Maintain a current core collection of resources reflecting standards relevant to the institution type.
- Maintain the collection to meet the changing needs of the users through an ongoing process of selection and deselection.

V. Staff Support

Goal: An institution provides the means for staff members to stay current in library standards and professional skills.

- Provide access to continuing education activities at all staffing levels.

- Encourage staff to keep abreast of current professional literature.
- Enable staff to network outside the institution, in the interest of sharing information and ideas.
- Support staff involvement in professional activities and organizations.

VI. Personnel

Goal: An institution maintains sufficient staff levels to properly meet user needs.

- Create job descriptions that define expectations, duties, and responsibilities for each position.
- Create a procedure for hiring new personnel specific to each staffing level.
- Maintain a staffing level that will cover service needs during hours of operation.
- Provide a compensation structure that is competitive with similar institutions.
- Evaluate staff members annually for key competencies, as defined by the relevant job description.

C. Professional Guidelines

I. Continuous Learning

Goal: Librarians stay current and effective by continuing to update the core knowledge they gained in their basic professional education.

- Update core knowledge to be aware of:
 - Current issues in librarianship,
 - Current reference resources,
 - Emerging technologies,
 - Areas of knowledge relevant to primary users.
- Keep abreast of current developments in the profession by reading the professional literature and subscribing to and actively participating in electronic discussions.
- Maintain memberships in and participate in local chapter meetings of professional organizations.
- Attend continuing education events, such as those sponsored by database vendors, graduate library schools, library systems, or professional organizations.

II. Support of the Profession

Goal: Librarians support users and the profession by supporting each other.

- Help others inside and outside their institutional setting to do whatever is necessary to help users find what they are seeking.
- Support library school students and librarians new to the profession by mentoring, offering tours of the workplace, participating in face-to-face or virtual question/answer forums, and participating in student outreach events sponsored by professional organizations.
- Share ideas and information through workshops, writing articles for professional journals, etc.

III. Collaborating with Colleagues

Goal: Librarians work with colleagues to maximize the effectiveness of the organization and the profession as a whole.

- Seek out, develop, and maintain professional partnerships and/or networks.
- Share new ideas, sources, or search strategies with colleagues.
- Recognize the knowledge and strengths of colleagues and seek advice or help as needed.
- Communicate regularly and effectively to ensure that common goals are understood and met.
- Promote not only his or her skills and the individual's department but also librarianship at large.

IV. Collaborating with Users

Goal: Librarians work with users and other library stakeholders to ensure that the users' needs are met.

- Seek out, develop, and maintain partnerships with users and other library stakeholders.
- Ask for users' feedback regarding user needs and how well they are being supported.
- Communicate regularly and effectively to ensure that common goals are understood and met.
- Refer users to other sources when in-house resources are unable to address the user's needs.

D. Service Guidelines

I. Approachability

Goal: Librarians provide an environment that encourages user interaction, in person or virtually.

- Establish a reference presence in a highly visible location in the library and on the library's website.
- Engage approaching users. The librarian is aware of the need to drop other activities to interact and focus on the user, and acknowledge others waiting for service.
- Establish eye contact and use a friendly greeting to initiate a conversation.
- Offer assistance at the user's point-of-need.

II. Accuracy

Goal: Librarians provide an effective search, physically and/or electronically, with accurate results.

- Select search terms that most relate to the query.
- Verify spelling.
- Identify appropriate sources that have the highest probability of containing relevant information.

III. Instruction

Goal: Librarians teach users how to locate, evaluate, and utilize information.

- Acknowledge the contribution brought by the user to the interaction and involve the user in the reference process. Ask the user's opinion and advice while working through the transaction.
- Explain search strategy and sequence to the user as well as sources used.
- Know when to refer to an appropriate outside resource.
- Explain how to use reference sources when appropriate.
- Provide instructional programs/classes and/or individual one-on-one assistance.

IV. Responsibility/Follow Through

Goal: Librarians are responsible for determining if users are satisfied with the results of a search, and are also responsible for referring a user to other sources.

- Ask users if their questions have been completely answered.
- Consult other librarians/colleagues or experts in the field when additional subject expertise is needed.
- Make arrangements to follow up with users if their needs require additional assistance.
- Refer users to other sources or institutions when additional resources are needed.
- Encourage users to return with further questions.

V. Ethical responsibilities

Goal: Librarians maintain the trust in a respected profession by behaving ethically.

- Recognize the confidentiality of information sought, received, consulted, or borrowed by the library user.
- Avoid creating or retaining unnecessary user records.
- Cooperate with state and federal confidentiality/privacy laws.
- Be honest, helpful, sincere, and discreet when working with library users.
- Refer users to appropriate authorities for questions that go beyond a librarian's professional capacity.

Resources Consulted

ALA Website:

- ❖ <http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/WOissues/civilliberties/civilliberties.htm>
- ❖ <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/librarybillrights.htm>

RUSA Reference Guidelines

- ❖ "Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians"
- ❖ "Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers"