
EPA Library Reference and Research Services Procedures	
EPA Classification No.: CIO 2170-P-02.2	CIO Approval Date: 12/28/2016
CIO Transmittal No.: 17-005k	Review Date: 12/28/2019

*Issued by the EPA Chief Information Officer,
Pursuant to Delegation 1-19, dated 07/07/2005*

EPA LIBRARY REFERENCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES PROCEDURES

1. PURPOSE

To establish Agency-wide procedures for the EPA National Library Network to provide reference and research services to EPA staff and to the public.

2. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

The procedures apply to the EPA National Library Network and all EPA organizations that provide library services either onsite or through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with another Network library. They provide baseline operational standards for all Network libraries. Individual libraries may develop local procedures to supplement the Network procedures.

3. AUDIENCE

The audience for the procedures includes Assistant, Deputy Assistant, and Associate Administrators; Regional, Deputy, and Assistant Regional Administrators; Senior Information Officials, Information Management Officers, Federal Library Managers, Contract Library Managers, and EPA staff.

4. BACKGROUND

The EPA National Library Network provides information support through reference and research services to EPA staff and to the public. EPA staff rely on library professionals and technicians familiar with EPA documents, databases, electronic resources, and print materials to supply needed background and research material on scientific, legal, business, and other research issues.

5. AUTHORITY

Agency Delegation 1-19 GENERAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND MISCELLANEOUS, Paragraph 2(b) (http://intranet.epa.gov/oei/imitpolicy/qic/documents/delegation_1-19_revised070705.pdf).

Information Directive: CIO 2170.3 EPA National Library Network (<http://www.epa.gov/irmpoli8>).

6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Reference Philosophy

The provision of reference services is a core function of EPA libraries. Reference services include the identification, collection, analysis, evaluation, and dissemination of specific and accurate information and knowledge to users to support their interests, objectives, and work. Reference services can be reactive (responding to direct inquiries) or proactive (anticipating user needs and providing services accordingly, e.g., current awareness services to keep users up-to-date in their fields of expertise).

EPA library professionals and technicians respond to information requests from EPA staff, contractors, other government agencies, and the general public; anticipate EPA staff information needs; disseminate information to EPA library patrons and make library resources accessible to library users. They stay abreast of new developments in research techniques and new features provided through both subscribed databases and EPA and other freely available databases. They provide reference and research services during operating hours as defined locally. They provide assistance in the use of the EPA National Library Catalog, complex reference sources, in-house and Web-based databases, library equipment and electronic resources.

To ensure consistent, high-quality reference services to EPA library users and to provide guidelines on handling patrons' requests, the following standards are maintained:

- 6.1.1 Each transaction is unique. Library professionals and technicians use their best professional judgment in evaluating and processing requests in accordance with the needs of users and the availability of resources.
- 6.1.2 Library professionals and technicians strive to answer all questions. This sometimes results in the need to refer a patron to another library, agency, or individual. If a librarian cannot answer a question, he/she will attempt to contact the referral directly. Referring a patron to another location is only done if it is in the best interest of the patron.
- 6.1.3 Library professionals and technicians cultivate listening and speaking skills. Using reference interview techniques, they clarify the inquiry if it is broad or ambiguous. They ask the patron if the question has been answered satisfactorily. If communication problems develop, they ask another librarian, if available, to assist the patron.
- 6.1.4 Reference professionals and technicians confer with other librarians onsite or at other locations if necessary.
- 6.1.5 Library professionals and technicians maintain awareness of the library's resources and new resources which would be beneficial for the library to acquire.
- 6.1.6 Whenever possible, information technologies are used to provide reference services to EPA staff working in the field, at emergency sites, and at home.
- 6.1.7 All patron inquiries are handled in a courteous and professional manner.

6.2 Service Priority

Library professionals and technicians respond to patron inquiries in the following priority order:

- 6.2.1 Onsite EPA employees receive highest service priority. In those libraries providing services to other locations through an agreement, this includes the EPA employees from the locations being served.
 - 6.2.2 Other EPA Regional and Laboratory libraries and employees.
 - 6.2.3 Authorized EPA contractors and other EPA affiliates including SEE Program participants, visiting scientists, interns, etc.
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- 6.2.4 Other government agencies.
- 6.2.5 Members of the general public.

6.3 Response Time

Inquiries from patrons are received by telephone, Web forms, email, chat, fax, mail, or in person. Reference services are provided in a manner that is timely and responsive to the needs of the requester. The length of time required to answer a question is determined by its complexity and the needs of the individual patron.

- 6.3.1 All non-rush or regular reference inquiries are answered promptly to meet the patron's information needs. The librarian evaluates the inquiry and informs the patron of anticipated response time if the request cannot be answered within the same business day.
- 6.3.2 All rush reference requests are given priority status. All rush requests are discussed with the patron, and an agreed-upon timeframe for response is established to ensure that the needs of the patron are met.
- 6.3.3 For extensive research requests, an estimate of time of completion is provided to the requester by the next business day.
- 6.3.4 Patrons are kept informed on the status of their request.
- 6.3.5 Patrons are provided with options or alternatives for other sources if the information they are seeking is not available in the library or included in the resources available to that library.

6.4 Reference Services Defined by Patron

- 6.4.1 Services available to EPA Staff and authorized contractors include:
 - 6.4.1.1 Library orientation and bibliographic instruction, including information on print and electronic library resources, basic catalog searching, and location of materials. Service is provided on an as-needed basis to individual patrons or as a scheduled presentation for a group.
 - 6.4.1.2 Literature searches and instruction on free or commercial resources.
 - 6.4.1.3 Internet instruction and/or use of a library computer for access.
 - 6.4.1.4 Preparation of bibliographies.
 - 6.4.1.5 Business searching and preparation of mailing lists.
 - 6.4.1.6 Library tours and demonstrations.
 - 6.4.1.7 Factual information questions answered by ready reference and extended reference services, e.g. ownership of a particular company, latest date of revision for a federal/state environmental regulation, etc.
 - 6.4.1.8 Referral to other agencies as appropriate.
 - 6.4.1.9 Database instruction and preparation of search aids/handouts.
 - 6.4.1.10 Referral to Lead Service Center Library as appropriate in cases where agreements are established.
- 6.4.2 Services available to public include:
 - 6.4.2.1 Reference on EPA topics.
 - 6.4.2.2 Instruction and information on the library and its resources.

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- 6.4.2.3 Instruction in the use of the EPA National Library Catalog.
- 6.4.2.4 Referral to other EPA information sources.
- 6.4.2.5 Information on how to order and/or access EPA publications.
- 6.4.2.6 Individual public tours as time permits. Group tours for the public are normally arranged in advance in accordance with local policies and procedures.

6.5 Reference Statistics

In order to have a basis for the review of reference and information services, each library keeps daily statistics on inquiries received. Standardized statistics are gathered according to the EPA Library Usage Statistics Procedures. The use of reference tracking software is recommended in high volume situations.

6.6 Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is of utmost importance since results of reference inquiries may be used to develop regulations, document court cases, and inform policy decision-making. The appropriate supervisory librarian in each location makes appropriate training available to all library professionals and technicians serving patrons and monitors responses according to local needs.

To ensure quality of service, EPA library professionals and technicians:

- 6.6.1 Obtain formal and informal feedback as appropriate from library users regarding reference services, including but not limited to issues such as relevance of information provided, turn-around time, and courtesy/customer service.
- 6.6.2 Consult with each other and through the EPA National Library Network as necessary to ensure the highest quality of reference service.
- 6.6.3 Maintain current awareness of emerging technologies and strive to demonstrate expert knowledge of the content and format of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate, select, and filter them.

7. RELATED DOCUMENTS

EPA Office of Environmental Information. CIO 2171-S-01. Customer Service and Public Access Standards, dated 01/24/2008 (<http://intranet.epa.gov/oei/imitpolicy/qic/ciopolicy/2171-s-01.pdf>).

FEDLINK. Handbook of Federal Librarianship, updated 08/25/2014 (<http://www.loc.gov/flicc/publications/LibHandbook2014/HandbookforFedLib2014final2.pdf>).

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. The Chief Information Officer (CIO) for the Agency has the overall responsibility for the governance and coordination of the EPA National Library Network, including establishing policy and supporting procedures, standards, and guidance to ensure the effective oversight of the EPA National Library Network.

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- B. Assistant Administrators and Regional Administrators with EPA National Library Network libraries are responsible for the management of their individual libraries, ensure compliance with Agency-wide policies, procedures, standards and guidance relating to the Library Network and ensure their individual libraries provide efficient and cost-effective access to information and data necessary to carry out EPA's mission.
- C. The National Library Program Manager has the day-to-day responsibility to provide assistance and guidance to offices in the operation of the EPA National Library Network and to ensure that the individual libraries provide efficient and cost-effective access to information and data necessary to carry out EPA's mission. The National Library Program Manager resides in the Office of Environmental Information.
- D. Federal Library Managers have first-line responsibility for operation of physical Network libraries and provision of library services and to ensure that their individual libraries provide efficient and cost-effective access to information and data necessary to carry out EPA's mission.

9. DEFINITIONS

Access: The ability of members of the public to obtain information from a government agency. All public libraries and most academic libraries in the United States are open to the general public, but access to certain areas such as closed stacks, rare books and special collections may be restricted. In a more general sense, the right or opportunity to use a resource that may not be openly and freely available to everyone. In computing, the privilege of using a computer system or online resource, usually controlled by the issuance of access codes to authorized users or, more broadly, the ability of a user to reach data stored on a computer or computer system.

Authorized EPA Contractor: An individual working under contract to the EPA whose Federal Project Officer grants him or her permission to use EPA library services, either in writing or in accordance with local policy.

Current Awareness: A service designed to alert scholars, researchers, readers, customers or employees to recently published literature or resources in their field(s) of specialization, usually available in special libraries serving companies, organizations and institutions in which access to current information is essential. Such services can be tailored to fit the interest profile of a specific individual or group.

Database: A large, regularly updated file of digitized information (e.g. bibliographic records, abstracts, full-text documents, directory entries, images, statistics, etc.) related to a specific subject or field, consisting of records of uniform format organized for ease and speed of search and retrieval and managed with the aid of database management system (DBMS) software. Content is usually created by the database producer. In the case of commercial databases, the content may be leased to one or more database vendors (Dialog, EBSCO, OCLC, etc.) that provide electronic access to the data after it has been converted to machine-readable form, usually online via the Internet, using proprietary search software. Most databases used in libraries are catalogs, periodical indexes, abstracting services and full-text reference resources

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leased annually under licensing agreements that limit access to registered borrowers and library staff.

EPA Document/Publication: An official EPA publication in any format, that has or should be assigned a special alpha-numeric identifier known as an EPA publication number.

EPA National Library Catalog: The online catalog for the EPA National Library Network, which provides bibliographical records for the items residing in EPA libraries and links to documents on environmental topics on the Internet. The Catalog allows searches by author, title, subject heading, any standard numbers that are assigned to the work, classification number and keywords present in the record.

EPA National Library Network: A national network composed of EPA libraries and repositories located in the Agency's Headquarters, Regional and Field Offices, Research Centers and specialized laboratories, as well as Web-based access to electronic collections. Network libraries are defined as those libraries with an official membership presence in OCLC. Centralized Network coordination comes from the Agency's Office of Environmental Information. Individual EPA libraries are administered by a range of offices in conjunction with contract staff.

Extended Reference: An inquiry response that involves the knowledge and use of multiple information resources and/or significant library staff time. Information resources can include, but are not limited to, databases, printed reference or other materials, and/or consultation with other libraries or subject experts. Extended reference questions typically require more than ten minutes to answer.

Materials: Items within the library collection that may include books, journals, reports, miscellaneous publications, microform, multimedia and other physical objects. Generally, library materials do not include official records, but convenience copies of records may be included.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): A memorandum signed by more than one agency or organization that promises cooperation or coordination on a specific issue, project or agenda.

Microform: A generic term for a highly reduced photographic copy of text and/or images stored on a translucent medium (microfiche or microfilm) or on an opaque medium such as card stock (microopaque or aperture card). Microforms can be original editions or reproductions. Reader-printer machines are required to view and make hard copies. Digital storage media such as magnetic tape and disk, CD-ROM, etc., are superseding microforms in information storage and retrieval to some extent.

MOU: See Memorandum of Understanding.

Patrons: Anyone authorized to use the materials and services of the library. May include EPA staff, contractors, and/or the public.

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Ready Reference: The provision of quick answers to factual questions, using standard sources such as dictionaries, almanacs or directories. Websites can also be used in lieu of printed references. The time to research a ready reference question is secondary to the level of effort, but should usually be in the 5-10 minute range. Directional questions (e.g., where is the copier?), and requests for assistance with equipment instruction/problems are not considered ready reference. Examples of Ready Reference questions: What is the address of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change? Who is the current president of the Sierra Club? Does this library have the book Silent Spring?

Reference: Services provided by library staff to meet the information needs of patrons (in person, by telephone, by mail or electronically), including but not limited to: answering questions; instructing users in the selection and use of appropriate tools and techniques for finding information; conducting searches on behalf of the patron; directing users to the location of library resources; assisting in the evaluation of information; and, when appropriate, referring patrons to resources outside the library.

Reference Interview: The interpersonal communication that occurs between a reference librarian and a library user to determine the requester's specific information need(s), which may turn out to be different than the reference question as initially posed. A reference interview may occur in person, by telephone or electronically.

10. WAIVERS

Waivers to these procedures must be approved by the Assistant Administrator for Environmental Information/Chief Information Officer. Waiver requests must be submitted in writing by the requesting office's Senior Information Official (SIO) through the Director of the Office of Enterprise Information Programs.

11. RELATED POLICIES, STANDARDS AND GUIDANCE

The following related policies, standards, and guidance documents are available on the Office of Environmental Information Policy page (<http://www.epa.gov/irmpoli8>):

CIO 2170-P-04.2. EPA Library Usage Statistics Procedures

CIO 2171.0. Information Access Policy, dated January 24, 2008.

12. MATERIAL SUPERSEDED

These procedures supersede CIO 2170-P-02.1 EPA Library Reference and Research Services Procedures, dated March 2011.

13. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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For further information about these procedures, please contact the EPA National Library Network Program Manager at epalibrarynetwork@epa.gov.



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