# EPA INFORMATION PROCEDURES

**OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION**

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*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

The purpose of this document is to establish Agency-wide procedures by which libraries in the EPA National Library Network provide reference and research services to EPA staff and to the public.

### 2.  SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

These 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 these procedures includes Assistant Administrators, Deputy Assistant Administrators, Regional Administrators, Deputy Regional Administrators, Assistant Regional Administrators, Associate 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 relies on library professionals and technicians familiar with EPA documents, literature databases, electronic sources, and print materials to supply needed background and research material on scientific, legal, and business 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).

CIO Policy 2170.1 EPA National Library Network dated 5/15/09 (http://intranet.epa.gov/oei/imitpolicy/policies.htm)

### 6.  PROCEDURES

## 6.1 Reference Philosophy

The provision of reference services is a core function of EPA libraries. Information 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 Online Library System (OLS), library equipment, in-house and Web-based databases, CD-ROMs, and complex reference sources.

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

6.1.1    Each transaction is unique. Library professionals and technicians must 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 will strive to answer all questions. This sometimes results in the need to refer a patron to another library, agency, or individual. In the event a librarian cannot answer a question, he/she should attempt to contact the referral directly. Referring a patron to another location should only be done if it is in the best interest of the patron.

6.1.3    Library professionals and technicians will cultivate listening and speaking skills. Using reference interview techniques, they will clarify the inquiry if it is broad or ambiguous. They should always ask the patron if the question has been answered satisfactorily. If communication problems develop, they will ask another librarian, if available, to assist the patron.

6.1.4    Reference professionals and technicians will confer with other librarians onsite or at other locations if necessary.

6.1.5    Library professionals and technicians will 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 will be used to provide reference services to EPA staff working in the field, at emergency sites and at home.

6.1.7    All patron inquiries will be handled in a courteous and professional manner.

## 6.2 Service Priority

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

6.2.1    EPA employees onsite 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.

6.2.4   Other government agencies.

6.2.5   Members of the general public.

6.3 Response Time

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

6.3.1   All non-rush or regular reference inquiries will be answered promptly to meet the patron's information needs.  The librarian will evaluate the inquiry and inform the patron of anticipated response time if the request cannot be answered within the same business day.

6.3.2   All rush reference requests will be given priority status.  All rush requests will be discussed with the patron and an agreed-upon timeframe for response will be established together to ensure that the needs of the patron are met.

6.3.3   For extensive research requests, an estimate of time of completion will be provided to the requester by the next business day.

6.3.4   Patrons must be kept informed on the status of their request.

6.3.5   Patrons will be 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 Service Defined by Patron

6.4.1   Services to EPA Staff and authorized contractors can include:

6.4.1.1   Library orientation and bibliographic instruction, including information on print and electronic library resources, basic Online Library System (OLS) searching, and location of materials. Service can be 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 resources.

6.4.1.3   Literature searches utilizing commercial (fee-based) services.

6.4.1.4   Internet instruction and/or use of a library computer for access.

6.4.1.5   Preparation of bibliographies.

6.4.1.6   Business searching and preparation of mailing lists.

6.4.1.7   Library tours and demonstrations.

6.4.1.8   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.

6.4.1.9   Referral to other agencies as appropriate.

6.4.1.10   CD-ROM or other database instruction and preparation of search aids/handouts.

6.4.1.11   Referral to Lead Service Center Library as appropriate in cases where agreements are established.

6.4.2   Services to public can include:

6.4.2.1   Reference on EPA topics.

6.4.2.2   Instruction and information on the library and its resources.

6.4.2.3    Instruction in the use of the Online Library System (OLS) and CD-ROMs.

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 will keep daily statistics on inquiries received. Standardized statistics will be 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 will make appropriate training available to all library professionals and technicians serving patrons and will monitor responses according to local needs.

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

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, 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. Customer Service Standards, updated 10/13/2010 (http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/feedback/standards.htm).

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).

Special Libraries Association. Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21st Century, revised edition, dated 06/2003 (http://www.sla.org/content/learn/members/competencies/index.cfm).

## 8.  ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Assistant Administrator for Environmental Information:**  The Assistant Administrator, OEI, as the 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.

**Assistant Administrators and Regional Administrators:**  Assistant Administrators and Regional Administrators with libraries within the EPA National Library Network have the overall responsibility for the management of their individual libraries, for compliance with Agency-wide policies,

procedures, standards and guidance relating to the Library Network and to ensure that their individual libraries provide efficient and cost-effective access to information and data necessary to carry out EPA's mission.

**National Library Program Manager:** 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 OEI's Office of Information Analysis and Access.

**Federal Library Managers:** The 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 policies.

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

**EPA Document/Publication:** An official EPA publication in any format, with a special alpha-numeric identifier known as an EPA publication number.

**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 the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) system.  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.

**OLS:** See Online Library System.

**Online Library System (OLS):** The online catalog for the EPA Library Network, which provides bibliographic records for the items residing in EPA libraries and links to documents on environmental topics on the Internet. OLS allows searches by author, title, subject heading, any standard numbers that are assigned to the work, classification number, and allows for keyword searching of the record.

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

**Ready Reference:** The provision of quick answers to factual questions, using standard sources such as dictionaries, almanacs, 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 <u>Silent Spring</u>?

**Reference:** Services provided by library staff to meet the information needs of patrons (in person, by telephone, 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, referring patrons to resources outside the library when appropriate.

**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.

**Services:** Any service provided by the library. The most common services are answering questions and conducting research (known as reference), providing access to online databases, and interlibrary loan to retrieve materials from other libraries.

## 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 Environmental Information, Office of Information Analysis and Access (OIAA).

## 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://epa.gov/irmpoli8/policies/index.html):

CIO 2170.1-P-04.  EPA Library Usage Statistics Procedures

CIO 2171.0.  Information Access Policy

## 12. MATERIAL SUPERSEDED

These procedures supersede the EPA Library Systems Manual 2130, dated January 1977.

## 13. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For further information about these procedures, please contact the Policy and Program Management Branch of the Information Access Division in Office of Information Analysis and Access, Office of Environmental Information.

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