

**AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL**

Item Number 907

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GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING INFORMATION REQUESTS

Revised 4/1/98

Information about libraries, librarians, and library and information services is one of the most important services that is provided by staff. For ALA members, receiving timely and accurate information is a valued benefit. When staff provides up-to-date information to customers, the public, government officials, educators, the press, and others, they create a positive image of libraries and advance the Association's goals.

ALA is committed to quality service. The following guidelines outline procedures that can help staff provide prompt and courteous answers, timely and accurate information, and appropriate referrals.

Telephone Requests

Every staff member is responsible for answering phones and listening to callers in a courteous manner. Because most ALA members do not serve on a committee or attend conferences regularly, calling ALA may be their only contact with their professional association. This experience should be rewarding and convey to members that ALA has time for their needs.

When a caller requests information or advisory services, staff should decide:

- 1). Does the call fall within my unit's scope of activity?
If so, follow your unit's procedures for answering questions. If not, use the ALA Referral Directory to determine which unit should handle the call. Should you be unable to make this determination, transfer the call to the Headquarters Library (extension 2159).

- 2). Is the call from the media?
If the caller is a reporter or other representative of the press, transfer the call to the Director of the Public Information Office (ext. 5042) or the PIO Press Officer (ext. 5043) unless you are the appropriate person in your unit to handle media calls or you verify that the appropriate person in your unit is available to take the call. Anyone who handles a media call should send a completed Media Contact Form to PIO.

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When you transfer a call:

Tell the caller to whom you are transferring them, why you are transferring them, and the person's extension number in case they want to call them again.

Never leave the caller with voice mail unless you have determined this is the caller's preference.

Before being disconnected, every caller should have either (1) an answer or (2) an indication of who will call them back with an answer and when they may expect the call.

Mail (including E-Mail) Requests

Handle mail requests promptly according to these guidelines:

Determine if the request falls within your unit's responsibility. If not, forward to the appropriate unit.

Answer all requests within a week of their receipt. If you receive a letter that already has been at Headquarters and the request is outside your unit's purview or you know it won't be answered that day, write or call the person and explain who will respond and when the inquirer may expect an answer.

In-Person Requests

Switchboard and reception staff should accommodate persons who come to ALA Headquarters according to Administrative Services procedures.

Routine Requests

Develop information sheets you can easily mail on topics for which you receive frequent requests. The Headquarters Library can help you develop these.

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Priorities

Each unit has its own priorities for handling information requests. Units should, however, want to consider the following suggestions as general guidelines:

Give same day service to ALA member-leader requests.

Give same day service to requests from the press and government officials.