POLICY

REFERENCE
Effective January 1, 2006

Reference Collection
Mifflin Community Library (MCL) maintains a current collection of print and electronic reference materials to answer information requests from its patrons. The reference collection supports the library’s efforts to provide short factual answers to reference questions and to provide outside sources of information (referrals) for answers not found within the library’s immediate collection.

In accordance with its collection development policy, MCL purchases and updates reference materials to support the needs of the general public. MCL is committed to building and maintaining a reference collection which is derived from the Core, Basic and Basic Plus lists endorsed by Berks County Public Libraries. Priority is given to resources that support the interests and needs of our adult patrons, as well as the curriculum of schools within our library’s service area. When a reputable reference source is available free in electronic form in the Internet, that source will normally not be duplicated in print in the reference collection. The nature of the collection requires that it be non-circulating.

Reference Services
1) Reference services are available to all patrons of the library - regardless of race, color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, physical ability, economic or social class.

2) Reference service is available during all hours the library is open to the public. Library staff is trained in the use of basic reference works which enables them to assist patrons with reference questions and/or to make referrals to other libraries and agencies when appropriate.

3) Reference questions, along with other services provided directly to patrons, take priority over all other duties. In-person and telephone requests are handled courteously in the order they are received. When business in the library does not permit a timely response to patrons’ inquiries, patrons are given the option of waiting or having the Library Director or trained staff get back to them by phone as soon as possible (at maximum within a twenty-four hour period).
4) The source of information for reference inquiries is always cited. The source’s date of publication is noted when relevant, as is always the case with business, medical, or legal inquiries.

5) Reference service is generally limited to brief inquiries for factual or statistical information which require from 5-15 minutes to answer. Library staff and volunteers do not perform in-depth research for patrons. Patrons who come to the library with substantial reference needs are assisted in locating potential resources, instructed in their use, and encouraged to conduct their own research. Telephone patrons with lengthy research inquiries should be encouraged to come to the library in person for assistance.

6) When the library lacks the resources necessary to answer inquiries, the library staff may refer the patron to the District Library Center reference staff (610-655-6355), or other agencies from which the desired information may potentially be obtained.

7) Patrons will also be directed to Ask Here PA, a 24/7 online reference service available as part of Pennsylvania’s Power Library.

Confidentiality
All reference inquiries are confidential. In compliance with the Library Confidentiality Act (Pennsylvania Act 90), the names of patrons or the nature of materials used by them will not be revealed to anyone, except by court order in a criminal proceeding. Records of completed research are not kept. The Library will comply with USA Patriot Act investigations according to legal regulations/precedent.

Limitations
1) Lengthy research for homework assignments will not be conducted in response to telephone inquiries.
2) No referrals will be made to individual practitioners, but rather to the appropriate county, state or national organizations.
3) Consumer information is limited to telling the patron whether or not one of the consumer services magazines held by the library contains the specific information needed.
4) Genealogical research questions will be referred to the Berks County Genealogical Society Library, Historical Society of Berks County Library, or the Pennsylvania Room of Reading Public Library.
5) For puzzle, contest, or quiz questions - the patron will only be shown what sources are available for them to do their own searching.
6) Statistical information can be provided, but the patron must do his/her own interpretation of this information.
7) Tax information is not provided. Patrons will be directed to copies of reproducible forms that are available and to online availability of tax forms and information.

Policy was reviewed and approved on August 24, 2016 by the Mifflin Community Library Board of Directors.