

DRAFT

## Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians

### Introduction

As the professional organization for reference and user services, the Reference and Users Services Association (RUSA) has developed and updated a model statement of competencies essential for successful reference and user services librarians. This statement builds upon [ALA's Core Competencies of Librarianship: Section 5. Reference and User Services](#), which defines the basic knowledge to be possessed by all graduates of ALA accredited master's programs. For each of the areas in Section 5 (A-G), a reference and user services librarian should know and be able to employ the concepts, principles and techniques of reference and user services to individuals of all ages and groups.

The RUSA competencies are critical to excellent reference and user services. Thus, they identify the underlying behaviors that lead to successful performance in organizations providing reference and user services to patrons. The competencies assume a basic infrastructure of competencies required by all professionals, such as skills related to communication, reading, writing, and mathematics. Therefore, the RUSA competencies focus on the abilities, skills, and knowledge that make reference and user services librarians unique from other professionals. The [Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers](#) are incorporated through specific reference into the *Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians*.

Competencies must be relevant to the particular job requirements. Individuals and organizations applying the Reference and User Services essential competencies may wish to identify additional competency statements by consulting resources, such as:

WebJunction's [Competency Index for the Library Field 2014](#) ,  
The Library Leadership and Management Association's (LLAMA) [statements on leadership competencies](#) , and the Association of College and Research Libraries' [Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians in Higher Education](#)

## **Definitions:**

*Reference and User Services Librarians:* Librarians who assist, advise, and instruct users in accessing all forms of recorded knowledge. The assistance, advice, and instruction include both direct and indirect service to patrons.

*Competencies:* Behaviors that excellent performers exhibit more consistently and effectively than average performers. A behavioral basis is necessary because effective assessment of competencies depends on observed behavior.

## **5A. Access relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information**

### **Offer services responsive to individual expressed user needs**

--- *Apply Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers*

--- Determine situational context of individual information needs

--- Engage in discussion and express interest in individual experiences related to information needs

--- Identify the most appropriate resources to use to offer assistance

--- Respect the right of individuals to pursue their research preferences

--- Assist users to manage, format, store, use, or display information

--- Analyze information sources in the context of accuracy, authority, interest, and content level

--- Select appropriate technology for providing answers, balancing the nature of the information being provided with user preferences.

--- Identify opportunities for instruction and empower users to improve their own information-seeking abilities

### **Organize and design services to meet the needs of the primary community**

--- Create physical and virtual environments that encourage use of all available services

--- Design services that reflect the demographics and special needs of the community

## **5B. Retrieve, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources**

### **Identify and present highly recommended sources**

- Connect users to highly recommended, carefully selected sources in many formats
- Evaluate reference sources for quality, pertinence, relevance, authenticity, and inclusiveness
- Determine authority of resources
- Identify any bias or point of view in an information resource
- Create research guides, web pages, bibliographies, and other appropriate tools in areas of expertise
- Compile and maintain information about community resources
- Develop programming, displays, tutorials, and other specialized instructional materials

## **5C. Interact with colleagues and others to provide consultation, mediation, and guidance in the use of knowledge and information**

### **Collaborate and partner with the user in the information seeking process**

- Engage the user in the process and in making decisions
- Determine the user's prior knowledge and expertise
- Consult appropriate internal and external resources

### **Collaborate with colleagues to provide service to users**

- Establish shared goals and values for excellent user services
- Facilitate team development with colleagues to improve user services
- Share knowledge and expertise with colleagues
- Recognize the unique knowledge, skills, and strengths of colleagues that can assist in responding to inquiries
- Elicit assistance from colleagues when appropriate to enhance the user experience

**Develop collaborative relationships within the profession to enhance service to users**

- Develop personal networks by actively participating in appropriate local, regional, state, national, and international organizations
- Identify and seek out possible partners in order to expand services
- Contribute to collaborative efforts that will benefit local users

**Develop and maintain partnerships beyond the library profession to strengthen services to users**

- Identify partners who are able to contribute valuable knowledge and expertise
- Communicate effectively with partners to ensure mutual understanding of goals, objectives, and values
- Form partnerships to improve existing systems and to develop new products and services

**5D. Develop expert knowledge of information literacy skills and abilities, including textual, digital, visual, numerical, and spatial literacies**

**Define information literacy**

- Create a personal definition of information literacy
- Develop a shared understanding with colleagues

**Integrate information literacy concepts into library services**

- Help learners to assess their own information needs, to differentiate among sources of information, and to develop skills to effectively identify, locate, and evaluate sources
- Adjust communication style and methods according to student needs and context
- Lead or facilitate discussion of controversial or unexpected issues in a skillful, non-judgmental manner that helps students to learn
- Promote constructive student-teacher exchanges by designing interactive presentations and exploratory activities
- Incorporate communication technologies to provide assistance to students in and outside the classroom

--- Request feedback from peers on instruction-related communication skills and respond to feedback through self improvement

### **Design and implement presentation and communication strategies to foster learning and engagement**

--- Make the best possible use of voice, eye contact, and gestures to keep class lively and students engaged

--- Present instructional content in diverse ways (written, oral, visual, online, or using presentation software) and select appropriate delivery methods according to class needs

--- Scale presentation content and learning activities to the users' needs and how people learn, adjusting to time, space, and technology available

--- Seek to clarify confusing terminology, avoiding excessive jargon, and using vocabulary appropriate for level of students

--- Practice or refine instruction content as necessary in order to achieve familiarity and confidence with planned presentation

### **Create a learner-centered teaching environment**

--- Implement active, collaborative, and other appropriate learning activities

--- Design group instruction sessions by defining expectations and desired learning outcomes in order to determine content, sequencing the lessons, and incorporating activities that facilitate learning

--- Design instruction to best meet the common learning characteristics of learners, including prior knowledge and experience, motivation to learn, cognitive abilities, and circumstances under which they will be learning

--- Modify teaching methods and delivery to address different learning styles, language abilities, developmental skills, age groups, and the diverse needs of student learners

--- Integrate appropriate technology into instruction to support experiential and collaborative learning as well as to improve student receptiveness, comprehension, and retention of information

--- Design effective assessments of student learning and use the data collected to guide personal teaching and professional development

--- Reflect on practice in order to improve teaching skills and acquire new knowledge of teaching methods and learning theories

--- Share teaching skills and knowledge with other instructional staff

## **5E. Promote and demonstrate the value of library services through marketing and advocacy**

### **Understand and apply marketing theory and practices**

--- Practice the basic principles of marketing and apply them to library services

--- Conduct research to assess marketing landscape and to determine current position among similar and/or competing businesses and organizations

--- Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of library services to enhance marketing strategy

--- Conduct periodic reviews of the community for opportunities to align needs with library services

--- Determine community relationships and develop partnering models of services with groups within the community

--- Identify, analyze, and prioritize target markets and audiences to determine how best to promote library services that can effectively serve them

### **Develop, implement, and evaluate an ongoing marketing plan for library services**

--- Set measurable market goals and objectives, including brand strategy

--- Develop consistent promotion and distribution strategies to meet the goals and objectives based on the analysis of target audiences

--- Participate in marketing training

--- Implement marketing efforts, maintaining records and clear communication with staff and stakeholders

--- Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the strategies and revise as necessary

### **Advocate the value of library services to the primary community**

- Engage with target audiences, connecting via the most appropriate tools and sources
- Communicate with library users, potential users, and other stakeholders through multiple communication formats and channels
- Maintain current awareness of communication tools and media sources used by target audiences
- Build relationships with partners who advocate on behalf of the library

## **5F. Assess and respond to diversity in user needs, user communities, and user preferences.**

### **Assess User Needs**

- Identify the user population and potential user population
- Collect and analyze information about users and user interactions with the library and its services
- Plan and conduct regular assessments of information needs of primary user groups, using various formal and informal methods
- Translate assessments of user needs into a plan for services that addresses the needs and preferences of diverse user groups

### **Assess Information Services**

- Develop and incorporate measures of evaluation into any new service
- Develop service standards for new and existing information services
- Create an organizational climate of assessment
- Analyze resources available and distribute resources to service programs most effectively meeting the user needs of a designated community
- Analyze demographic and other information about the community to develop a wide variety of services, which meet the needs and interests of diverse communities

### **Assess Information Resources**

- Maintain quality of collection resources by evaluating all formats for accuracy and currency
- Determine authority of resources
- Identify any bias or point of view in an information resource
- Evaluate new information sources appropriate for primary users
- Consult a wide variety of reviewing sources to identify those best meeting needs of the primary community
- Read reviews of new information resources to complement a librarian's own judgment
- Write and publish reviews of new information resources

### **Assess Service Delivery**

- Determine the appropriate mix of technologies and delivery channels to meet diverse user needs and preferences
- Experiment and evaluate changes in services to users
- Evaluate the allocation of human and fiscal resources to ensure they are supporting priority services and delivery methods

### **Assess User Interfaces for Information Resources**

- Identify factors that impede the use of the resource
- Evaluate format, access, and presentation aspects of resources
- Communicate with information resource designers about usability concerns
- Determine if there are alternative resources that have better user interfaces and resources

### **Assess Assistance to Users by Information Service Providers**

- Identify and apply those performance measures that have been developed by the profession, for example, RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance
- Consult with information service staff to develop a consensus of service standards
- Develop measures that will be useful in assessing whether or not service standards are being met

--- Promote and encourage an esprit de corps that will work to evaluate and improve service behaviors

## **5G. Investigate, analyze, and plan in order to develop future services**

### **Lead a Life as a Learner**

--- Devise and implement strategies to learn about emerging tools and techniques, and connect with professional communities to seek and share best practices

--- Identify potential new services and programs through contact in the professional community, readings, and other exploration

--- Seek opportunities to be informed, gathering news and information about the local, national, and international environment

--- Encourage discussion in the work group that furthers reflection on services offered and on potential needs

--- Practice self-reflection, including an awareness of personal strengths and limitations

--- Maintain currency with developments in understanding how people learn and with the best ways of facilitating learning in both formal and informal settings

### **Develop and implement plans for services and resources**

--- Apply knowledge of the information seeking process to structure information services for users

--- Promote evidence-based decision making and fiscal responsibility

--- Initiate changes based on analysis of evaluation results

--- Retain valued, successful, and cost-effective programs and services

--- Evaluate new technologies to determine if they meet user needs more effectively than current methods

--- Propose new services and programming to address identified unmet needs, taking advantage of new technologies

--- Plan for the introduction of new services and programming, delineating required support and markers of success

--- Allocate resources to reflect decisions made for service and programming

## **Plan, implement, and evaluate small-scale, innovative experiments in services and resources**

- Identify alternative strategies for proposed improvements
- Select for experimentation the options determined by critical examination to be most likely to succeed
- Employ experimental, small-scale projects designed to improve services and service deliver
- Evaluate results using clearly established criteria

## **Resources Consulted**

American Library Association. [\*Core Competencies of Librarianship\*](#). 2009.

American Library Association. Association of College and Research Libraries. [\*Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians in Higher Education\*](#) (draft revision of Standards and Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators, 2009). October 13, 2016.

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Association for Talent Development. [\*The ATD Competency Model\*](#). 2014.

[\*Guide for Writing Functional Competencies\*](#). University of Baltimore, 10/13/2005

Appendix I: Suggested verbs for task statements, pp. 25-27

Appendix II. Verbs to avoid using in task statements, p. 28

Appendix III. Verbs to be used with caution in task statements, pp. 29-30

Houston, Anne. "[\*What in a Name? Toward a New Definition of Reference\*](#)." *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 55(Spring 2016): 186-188.

WebJunction. [\*Competency Index for the Library Field\*](#). 2014.