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Improving the Quality of Documents Reference Service: Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

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Introduction – Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

- Main Library & 42 Branches
- Separate Public Documents Department
- 12.8 Million Circulation, 1998
- Serve 850,000+ Users
- Increased Visibility & Accountability

Reference & Information Service Standards

- Developed with staff in 1997
- Introduced to all supervisors & staff in 1998
- 57-page booklet
- Cover both general philosophy and very specific scenarios

Standards Overview

- Serve as training tool for new staff
- Serve as evaluation guidelines for new performance management program, for example all patrons helped within an initial 5-minute period
- An aid for the Library "...to achieve an equitable and consistently high level of

reference and information service."

- General Guidelines
- 10 Standards of Public Service
- Define Levels of Assistance, including Ready Reference to Instruction
- Time Limits and Number Constraints

Factors Which Affect Provision of Reference Service

- Time Constraints
- Collection Constraints
- Legal Constraints
- Professional Constraints
- Ethical Constraints

Once-and-for-All

- Trivia Questions
- Bar Bets
- Patrons on phone vs. in person
- Homework Questions
- Instruction vs. the Answer
- Names

Documents-Related

- Copyright Searches
- Interlibrary Loan -- Now Decentralized
- Legal Information -- "Library Staff cannot interpret law or offer legal opinions or advice"
- Patent Information -- PTDL Depository

- Tax Information and Forms
- Trademark Searches

The Bottom Line

- Becoming uniform in system
- Additional emphasis through the evaluation process
- Very useful for training non-professional public service staff
- Careful attention to Documents-related issues