

## Patron-Centred Service Administrative Policy and Guidelines

The best practices and illustrative examples are detailed here to support staff to deliver the Patron-Centred Service Administrative Policy.

Please note: The Administrative Policy is issued by the Directors Group and therefore the policy statements contained here (1-11) are only revised through the regular policy review cycle of the Directors Group.

### PATRON-CENTRED SERVICE GUIDELINES with Best Practices & Illustrative Examples

We are committed to:

1. **Delivering patron-centred service at all times and to the best of our abilities.**

***Patron-centred service is understanding the perspectives and needs of the individual patron, which is key to providing proactive and responsive service. It entails engaging and connecting with each patron's needs with curiosity, flexibility and empathy.***

Taking a patron-centred approach asks us to consider each interaction on its own terms, and find solutions that are appropriate to the patron's needs and reflective of our values. Not every interaction will be handled in the same way or fit exactly into procedures as described in a manual, but the solution will be our best attempts to meet individual needs.

As part of our commitment to be open and accessible for all, we work proactively to reduce potential barriers that a patron may face when it comes to using the library and our resources. We take the time to listen to each patron's situation respectfully and without judgement and work with them as individuals to find an outcome that works for them and the library.

#### *Patron-Centred Service Approach to Fines*

Fines are one of the most common barriers faced by patrons. While automatically waiving fines might be a quick solution, without exploring the root cause of the issue the patron may continue to accumulate fines and have an unrealistic expectation that staff will always waive their fines.

The patron-centred approach may include waiving fines and a conversation with the patron to determine the best method to help them avoid this situation in the future, for example: showing them how to renew materials or registering them for an Access card.

**2. Proudly sharing the Library's services and surprising and delighting patrons by exceeding their expectations.**

Finding a way to say "yes" is a core part of our customer service. We do our best to consistently and reliably meet our patrons' needs. We understand that "yes" may take many forms – sometimes we can surprise a patron by showing them more than what they thought the library could offer; other times we may respond to a request with a range of other options to offer a patron if a specific resource is not available. In all situations, we will ensure that the patron feels like we listened with curiosity and did all that we could to help, using all the system resources available.

We provide accurate information and enhance the awareness and use of our resources by keeping our knowledge of library services, policies, resources and the community current. Ways to stay informed include reviewing the public website, exploring the HUB, professional development, and learning from colleagues in other branches and departments.

We may not always know the answer to every question – that's ok. If we are unable to find the answer, acknowledge that we are learning as well and we can find someone who can help the patron, or do our best to guide them in the right direction. This is where our knowledge of the library, our staff, resources, and services pays off.

**3. Providing a vibrant, welcoming and inclusive space that is open to all.**

As an institution committed to the continued growth and improvement of everyone who lives in the city, providing vibrant, welcoming, respectful, and inclusive spaces is essential. We serve diverse communities and patrons and endeavor to meet their needs equitably, with empathy, thoughtfulness, and an open-mind.

Patrons should know they are our priority. For example, when a patron enters the library, we want to be proactive by acknowledging and greeting them. This is an important way to make a positive impression, and set the tone for future interactions. This can be done through positive body language, such as smiling, making eye contact, and giving patrons our attention.

A specific standard is the *10/5 Guideline*. This articulates when we are within:

- *Ten feet* of a patron, we make eye contact and warmly smile to acknowledge the person.
- *Five feet* of a patron we add a greeting or friendly gesture to invite engagement.

We all play a role in ensuring that the library is an open and respectful space and ensuring we create and maintain a positive and inspiring environment where everyone can create and share ideas and information.

#### **4. Communicating with patrons in an open, respectful and accessible manner.**

Open and respectful communication starts with us. Does our body language convey that we are proud to offer service and are here to help? Do we invite patrons to start a conversation with us by acknowledging them with friendly eye contact or greeting them by saying hello?

When in a conversation, we listen attentively and actively, asking clarifying questions to make sure we understand what the patron is looking for, or nodding along to convey we are listening. We stop other tasks that we might be working on to demonstrate we are giving the patron our full attention: if we were shelving, we can place the items down and turn to the face the patron; or if we were at a computer, we pause from typing and look up from the screen.

The words we choose in conversation can make a difference. For example, technical jargon or acronyms are not helpful to use when talking to a patron, or when helping someone at a computer. Take a moment to think about the words we use: is there a better, clearer way to communicate what we want to say?

It is also important to consider other factors that can impact an interaction with a patron: are there differences in first languages, gender, age, socio-economic background, and more that can affect how our words might be interpreted? Some situations may require greater attention to careful communication so as to avoid misinterpretation or unintended offense.

Use people-first language to convey respect. For example, try saying “a person with a print disability” instead of “a blind person”. This is a way to recognize that people are more than just defined (negatively) by their ability or any other perceived categories such as language or culture. (See [ASV](#) for more tips)

Communicate using positive language. This is helpful whether we are explaining to a new patron how to use their library card, or when behaviour expectations need to be addressed. In both situations, we want to convey respect: instead of stating what a person cannot do in the library, give them positive options for what they can do.

#### **5. Respecting patron confidentiality and privacy.**

Maintaining patron confidentiality and privacy is essential to creating a respectful space. Patrons must be able to seek information and share information with the library knowing that we are open and non-judgemental and are committed to protecting their privacy. Maintaining patron confidentiality builds trust in the library. For example, during a conversation about a patron’s account, allow the patron to have some space from other patrons. We can politely ask the next patron in line to wait a few steps back if they are unaware they are too close.

Only share a patron’s information with other staff if needed, such as with a supervisor, or if passing on a question to a co-worker. Balance being friendly while maintaining any privacy a patron may wish to have. If they choose to have some quiet time, give the patron space while still letting them know that we are available to help any time they chose to ask.

Read more on the [Protection of Privacy policy](#) and [Crew Talk](#).

## 6. Upholding the right of intellectual freedom of all patrons.

Libraries have a core responsibility to support, defend and promote the universal principles of intellectual freedom and privacy. All patrons have a right to use the library without judgement, whether it is the questions they might ask, materials they want to borrow, or personal information that might be shared with the library. Treat any questions or research a person may be interested in or material that person checks out with professionalism and neutrality. We maintain this neutrality regardless of the topic or type of material even if it considered unpopular or unacceptable by some.

We uphold Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on intellectual freedom:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”—Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Read more in the [Collection Development policy](#) on how intellectual freedom applies to our collections.

## 7. Being accountable to patrons and staff by following through in a timely manner.

Our goal is to be accountable to patrons by following through and by doing what we said we were going to do. One way to remember this is to think of the power of *TOFU: Take ownership, follow up*. When communicating, we explain the steps of what is happening and what is going to happen. This helps to offer a level of transparency to the process and to provide realistic expectations, such as timelines on responses and action.

When we receive feedback from patrons, we demonstrate accountability by passing this along through appropriate channels, whether it be to a supervisor or management. If challenges arise as part of our work and patron interactions, we inform supervisors as soon as possible.

How we are accountable to each other staff is similar to how we are accountable to patrons. When we pass along information to other staff, we want to make sure that it is a “warm hand off”, meaning we explain to them the background situation and provide all relevant information to set them up for success.

If we make a mistake, that’s ok – mistakes happen. We take ownership of the situation and do our best to follow up and work toward solutions. The way we recover from mistakes strengthens the relationship and trust between our patrons and the library.

**8. Providing information that is relevant and accurate.**

We are committed to engaging and enlightening our patrons and our community. We support patrons' life-long learning by focussing on developing their information literacy skills and by providing reliable, authoritative, relevant, accurate and timely information. In instances where popular opinion is misleading, we will take a balanced approach in our responses by respecting the patron's information request and also providing authoritative sources where possible.

To best address the information needs of our users, we must take a patron-centred approach to get to the root of what they are looking for. This includes asking clarifying questions, listening, repeating (but not parroting), and not making assumptions.

You can find more information on conducting a reference interview in the [Information Service Guidelines](#).

**9. Ensuring patron-centred service through fostering a work culture that supports innovation and creativity and is progressive, collaborative, and engaged in learning.**

Our success at delivering inspiring patron-centred service at VPL comes from the work culture that we create together to support each other. Everyone has a role to play in making the library a progressive, open and inspiring resource for the city and all contributions are valued. All our participation is key.

Find ways to contribute in this supportive culture of learning and curiosity. We collaborate with our teams through participation in staff meetings and making suggestions for innovations and improvements. Be open to learning, be curious, be creative and reflect on ways we can improve. Connect with a co-worker or supervisor to share news, resources or best practices, and learn from each other and celebrate things we do well.

Recognize that no one has to handle a situation alone: ask for or offer help. We work together in our different roles to provide inspiring patron-centred service. Take pride in treating staff with the same great service we offer to patrons. When disagreements arise, seek to understand them with empathy and curiosity, not judgement, and work toward a solution together. After a challenging situation, take a moment to debrief with others to learn how to improve for next time. It is also a great idea to debrief after inspiring interactions to learn what we did well and share that learning with our colleagues.

**10. Recognising that employees are also patrons and that our treatment of each other will be reflected in how we treat other patrons.**

The commitments we make in each of these patron-centred service guidelines apply to staff as well as patrons. As internal patrons, library and City of Vancouver staff are treated with the same respect and patron-centred approach as any other member of the public. The internal

customer service we provide supports staff collaboration and the effective use of the library's resources.

**11. Ensuring the leadership team empower staff by inspiring, modelling, coaching and supporting excellent patron-centred service.**

The library leadership team or all staff who have a supervisory role in the library, are responsible for cultivating a culture that values, prioritizes and supports patron-centred service. The leadership team will strive to share knowledge and expertise and work to identify and make available development and learning opportunities. We will be open to constructive feedback and supportive of staff collaboration, learning and ideas. The potential of staff to grow and achieve will be recognized, and when mistakes happen, staff will be supported in learning from them.

Leadership staff will also support each other through communicating as a team, engaging in professional development, and sharing experiences and expertise to increase the delivery of patron-centred service excellence across the system.