

NYLA DEVELOPING LEADERS 2026

Making Real Change: Customer Experience in Public Libraries

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Why did we want to look at customer service?

- What exactly is customer service?
- Owning our story
- All come from different backgrounds
- Comes out of a philosophy

Help Me Help You

**Smiling's my
favorite**

*"Negative gets worse if you don't
respond. Positive grows when you do."*

Dowd, Nancy

Not Just Service Desks...

- Customer service is provided through ALL positions at the library
- Consistency is created by drawing from a single set of guiding principles
- Every staff member can follow a customer service mentality and guiding principles in their work, regardless of their role at the library
- Customer service improves and excels when it is made and retained as a priority.



"Staff must understand the customer service philosophy and equally participate in upholding the customer service plan." - Schachter, Debbie

Customer Service is a priority throughout the library, across all positions!

Build Your Task Force

- Invite all staff who want to be involved
- Lay out goals, expectations, timeline, etc.
- Work with management for support and collaboration
- Review Mission and Vision Statements
- Create a list of universal customer service principles



"...a manager can tell a story in which a proposed change is simultaneously awful and exciting... It can help others see things they are not currently seeing."

-Cameron, Esther, and Mike Green

WHERE TO START

Questionnaire & In- person Meeting

[Google Form Example](#) (Staff)
[Google Form Example](#) (Patron)

Identify the baseline:

- Ask staff for their opinions on what needs attention & their thoughts on current customer service
- Ask patrons for their opinions on current customer service
- Figure out “what we do here.” How do we provide service?

“Like it or not folks, we no longer have “patrons” who graciously accept what the library profession selects and offers.”

—Koontz, Christie



Staff Survey

When hired, do you believe you were given proper training in regards to providing quality customer service?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How do you think your supervisor(s) values customer service in your department?

- ☐ It's a priority that is consistently reinforced
- ☐ It's important but is inconsistently addressed
- ☐ It's not important and is barely discussed

How often do patrons positively remark on the customer service they are provided?

- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

How often do patrons negatively remark on the customer service they are provided (or lack thereof)?

- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Patron Survey

Do you feel that staff are friendly and easily approachable?

- ☐ Generally, yes
- ☐ Sometimes yes, but other times no
- ☐ Generally, no

Do you believe there is a difference between the customer service given between departments?

- ☐ Yes, but it isn't an issue
- ☐ Yes, and I think it's a problem
- ☐ No, there isn't any difference
- ☐ I haven't noticed

When you have a question, do you feel like you usually get a satisfactory answer or are pointed in the right direction?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

Please check off what is most important to you when visiting the library (check as many as you'd like).

- ☐ Maintenance and cleanliness
- ☐ Technology (using computers, printing, copying, etc.)
- ☐ Programs

Evaluation of Results & Moving Forward

- Collect and analyze data from in-person meetings and forms
- Align results with principles developed by the team and reevaluate timeline if necessary
- Determine what staff need from the team and administration for support
- Communicate with staff the plan moving forward including expectations, modes of feedback, follow up meetings, etc.



*"The articulation of customer service expectations ultimately helped reduce stress because it clarified for staff and customers what the library believed it could deliver." -
Wehmeyer, S., Auchter, D., & Hirshon, A*

We Started It!

The F.I.R.E. Library

The F.I.R.E. Library's Mission Statement:

To provide equal access to materials, programs, and services that enrich, connect, and inspire our community for lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, and enjoyment.

Customer Service Principles:

- Consistency
- Connecting patrons with the resources and materials to “do life things”
- Making sure a patron never leaves without some sort of solution/need met/referral
- Being a reliable source of help and knowledge
- Being inclusive and welcoming
- Staying inquisitive
- Being responsive to and reflective of the community's evolving needs
- Creating healthy expectations for interactions between staff and patrons

The Library's guiding documents, mission, vision, etc. guide the creation of the customer service principles.

Now help us finish it!

In-person group discussion question examples:

- What is one of the most common tasks you do at work?
- What do you think the most important part of your job is?
- What is an area in your work in which you don't think customer service is relevant?

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Keep the Momentum Going

- ★ Accountability
- ★ Mentorship
- ★ Peer to Peer Empowerment
- ★ Leading by Example
- ★ Shout Outs

"...customer service responsiveness can mean frequently retooling your services and products." -Schachter, Debbie



Thank you!

Questions?



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