Some folks think reference service in a local public library is dead.

So, what's the job of today's reference librarian?

There are several:

- ✓ **to respond to customer questions** in person or on the telephone as we always have done;
- ✓ **to be alert to key community issues and questions,** and **to dive into meetings outside the library** where they are being discussed;
- ✓ **to help figure out** just what the real questions might be;
- ✓ **to provide solid, authoritative information** in response to those questions;
- ✓ **to deliver answers back to the community in a variety of formats**, up to and including executive summaries, presentations, and virtual resources available 24/7;
- ✓ **to archive those presentations and resources**, and thereby provide a way for a community to acknowledge and understand its own emerging identity.

Doing research on the Web is like using a library assembled piecemeal by pack rats and vandalized nightly.
~ Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times* film critic

The INTERNET is the best library in the world, but all its books are strewn all over the floor.

What the INTERNET needs is a good librarian, and one can be found at the local public.

There are resources to help:

📖 The Texas State Library has published Margaret Irby Nichols's **Selecting and Using a Core Reference Collection**
Reference Sources for Small and Medium-sized Libraries. 8th ed. ALA, 2014.
Recommended Reference Books for Small and Medium-sized Libraries and Media Centers, 2014 Edition, Volume 34. Shannon Graff Hysell, ed. Libraries Unlimited, 2014.

💻 The Maine State Library has also prepared a **Bare Bones Reference List for Small & Medium Libraries**.
The New Mexico State Library has prepared a **Basic Reference Resources** guide.
The Vermont State Library has assembled a list of **Basic Reference on the Web**.

Robert Putnam (author of *Bowling Alone*) points out in
Better Together: Restoring the American Community. Simon & Schuster, 2003:

"The prediction that the World Wide Web would kill libraries ignores another essential role of the public library in the Internet age. The almost inconceivable variety of information available online is a mixed blessing, as even casual Internet users quickly discover. Finding a few needles of useful, reliable information in vast haystacks of junk calls for precisely the skills that librarians have always had. In the past, people counted on them to locate and evaluate printed information; now they look to librarians for help in making sense of what they find on the Internet, and for distinguishing good information from bad. The reference librarians whose job it is to answer every question phoned in to the library report that they get as many questions as ever, but the questions have gotten more sophisticated as Internet use has increased. Many people find answers on the Internet to questions they used to ask librarians - phone numbers and addresses of institutions, sources of quotations, basic facts of science and geography. Now they ask the questions that arise after they get answers to the simple ones, along with asking which electronic sources of information are realizable and which are not. The techno-utopian belief that access to unlimited information automatically translates into understanding and knowledge has proved to be false. Trained guides are more important than ever, and libraries provide them."