



Legal Reference: Building a Foundation for Success

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**MONTANA**  

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**JUDICIAL BRANCH**

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# Agenda

Access to Justice

The Reference Interaction

Evaluating Legal Information

Our Legal System

Finding Forms

Referrals

Image: Meeting of Montana Bar Association in Great Falls, Montana (circa 1914). From the Montana History Portal.



# Access to Justice: Access, Coordination, Education and Resource Development

Access to Justice is the ability of people to seek and obtain fair, accessible, and equitable assistance in reaching an outcome under the law. Legal needs fall in a broad spectrum, from a need for basic legal information, to problems that can be dealt with using self-help resources and limited legal representation, to complicated issues requiring full legal representation.

Image: Riders and horses in a parade down Main St., Helena, Montana. This may be the July 4th parade, which was at the same time as the rodeo. It also might be the Vigilante Parade, which was a high school parade with horses and floats with the students building all the floats (circa 1941-1944). From the Montana History Portal.

# The Reference Interaction

The main difference separating general reference from legal reference is that most often, with a legal reference question, staff responds to the question with resources that address the underlying topic of the question. Staff does NOT answer the question. As information experts, library staff can provide information to the patron, but not advice.

Image: Blackfeet Indians in Helena, as Federal Court witnesses (circa 1905). From the Montana History Portal.



# The Reference Interaction Advice versus Information

## Advice

Requires careful analysis of the law as it applies to a person's specific situation

May affect someone's rights and responsibilities

Keeps the decision-making in OUR hands

## Information

Lets the other person know what possibilities are out there

Educates the person about a topic without limiting options

Puts the decision-making in THEIR hands

Image: Blackfeet Indians in Helena, as Federal Court witnesses (circa 1905). From the Montana History Portal.

# Evaluating Legal Information

Librarians are taught to evaluate information sources, in many formats, for reliability. The same criteria for assessing the reliability of a general source apply to legal information sources.

Key Components: Authority, Objectivity, Accuracy, Coverage, Timeliness

Image: Carter County Court House in Ekalaka, Mont. From the Montana History Portal.



# Our Legal System

Government Organization

Understanding the “location” of  
the Law

Court Structure and Process

Image: View of Courthouse Square in Helena, Montana, including the Lewis and Clark County Jail on the left and the Lewis and Clark County Courthouse in the center (circa 1888-1890). From the Montana History Portal.

# Finding Forms

<https://courts.mt.gov/Forms/>

Image: View of the first tribunal or jury in the State of Montana in which both men and women served together (Feb. 22, 1940). From the Montana History Portal.

# Referrals

State Law Library of Montana

Self-Help Centers

Montana Legal Services Association

MontanaLawHelp.org

Image: The ground breaking ceremony of the Montana State Justice Building, August 11, 1980 (Feb. 22, 1940). From the Montana History Portal.

# MSL Evaluation Survey



<https://forms.office.com/g/ffUuzbA8gn>



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