

TRUSTEE TOPICS

Prepared by the
Kansas State Library and the
Kansas Library Trustee Association

CARING FOR THE LIBRARY DIRECTOR'S POSITION

GOAL:

This article is intended to help trustees have a productive partnership with a capable and talented library administrator.

BACKGROUND:

The Kansas State Library and the regional library systems are continuously working to make sure that Kansas library directors are well trained and well supported with a variety of professional resources.

Library directors in Kansas attend a variety of library education events and can call system and state library consultants for advice on legal, financial, administrative, technical or marketing issues. Librarians who cannot work for the MLS degree can obtain KPLACE certification, which is the library education standard for librarians who serve less than 8000 people, or work for the undergraduate Library Services Certificates.

A good staff is the most important component in developing a good public library. The most important staff member is the director. The library staff may be large or small, all paid or part volunteer. But it takes a good library director, working with a good board, to create the most effective and productive library staff.

Many Kansas library directors do not hold the MLS degree. Even if they do, they have to have a strong commitment to lifelong learning to keep their skills updated and handle their positions capably. All Kansas library directors should pursue an active program of continuing education and lifelong learning. The KPLACE Certification has become the education

standard for library directors who serve less than 8000 people and do not have the MLS degree.

The library director must be allowed to supervise the staff and handle the operation of the library without micro-management or interference from the board. There should be a position description for the library director and a job description for board members that defines their respective duties. In order to manage the library administration effectively, the library director also needs:

- position descriptions that define the essential duties of every library staff member
- a library policy manual that states the library's policies on personnel, collections, services, trustees, and emergency procedures
- a format and schedule for semi-annual or annual evaluation of the director's position
- an effective program of continuing education for career-long library training
- a competitive compensation package with an appropriate salary and good benefits.

A library board that does not have good policies, procedures, partnerships and compensation in place will find it difficult to retain a capable and talented administrator. They will also find it more difficult to find a new director when this becomes necessary. But it is usually the library staff who present policies, procedures and salary schedules for the library board to review, edit and adopt.

ISSUES:

Hiring a New Director

1. Get the current director's resignation in writing and conduct an exit interview. If the director is leaving in good standing, listen carefully to any recommendations for the future. In any case, look carefully at the library's current situation. Review compensation and benefits to be sure they are reasonable.

2. Write a job description that includes responsibilities, specific duties, salary and fringe benefits, terms of probation or evaluation, minimum qualifications and experience, desirable qualifications and experience and to whom the director is responsible. Make sure that the minimum qualifications are limited to those that are truly essential to the position.

3. Form a search committee. Agree on procedures, budget and a timeline and submit them in writing to the full board. Make plans to keep full documentation on every step of the process for the board's protection.

4. Determine methods of recruitment. The position advertisement can be distributed to:

- local newspapers
- library schools
- state joblines
- national library journal postings

5. Write posting for position that contains the following:

- job title
- responsibilities
- qualifications
- salary range and minimum salary
- employee benefits
- request for resume and at least three references
- date of availability
- person to submit applications to
- closing date for applications
- an equal opportunity employer statement

6. Determine the questions to be asked of the candidates. All candidates should be asked the same basic questions with additional questions based on the answers to the basic questions.

Appropriate areas for questioning are:

- record of achievements
- record of stability

- knowledge, skills, abilities
- education
- experience
- interest in position
- expectations

7. Select the three to eight most competitive candidates to interview in person. If the applicants are not satisfactory, it is better to re-advertise the position than to lower the standards for the job. Make sure the salary is high enough to attract candidates of the desired caliber.

8. Send the candidates information on the library and the community before they come for the interview.

9. Set a positive and comfortable tone for the position interview. Provide a tour of the library and allow the candidate to talk with staff members in addition to the interview.

10. Interview the applicants in a professional fashion.

11. Answer the finalists' questions openly. Be frank about your expectations, what the job has to offer and any unusual problems the new director may be facing.

12. Select the best candidate and submit selection to the full board. A formal motion and vote should confirm.

13. Notify the successful candidate in writing and get an acceptance in writing. Notify the unsuccessful candidates in writing that a director has been selected.

14. Send an announcement to the local media after the successful candidate accepts.

15. Appoint a trustee to be available for the first few months of the director's tenure to answer questions.

16. Keep all the paperwork connected with the hiring process on file.

Evaluating the Director

The evaluation of the library director should be an ongoing process, a natural outgrowth of a good relationship between trustees and library administrator. The director should be given help with problems and advice on mistakes in a timely fashion that facilitates quick resolution.

A formal annual evaluation of the library director is an excellent management practice. If the director is generally satisfactory, this should be an appraisal of the job description and of progress with specific objectives. If the director looks forward to a chance to evaluate the director's position, rather than dreading a forum for unforeseen criticism, he is more likely to make effective adjustments in his priorities.

There are times when the director is not performing to the board's satisfaction in certain areas. At such times, the board's watchword should be SPECIFICS. The director should be given specific tasks to accomplish within a specific period or specific behaviors to change. Unspecific charges such as "bad attitude" are more likely to result in frustration and anger than constructive change. Many directors have successfully corrected an unsatisfactory situation after they gained a clear understanding of the board's expectations.

Any evaluation of the library director should be based on how the library itself is doing. The board might consider questions such as:

- Has the director managed the library so that it can provide the intended services?
- Has the director managed the staff so that operations are friendly, efficient and cost effective?
- Is the community visibly pleased with the public library?
- Has the director been a leader in making the community aware of the library as an important service?

- Has the director made progress in achieving the objectives outlined in the library's plan?
- Has the director provided sufficient information to the board so that it can perform effectively?
- Has the director kept in touch with new trends in library service and relayed these to the staff and the board?

Dismissing the Director

Probably the most painful situation a public library board can face is the dismissal of the library director. Boards that hire carefully, communicate well, nurture positive working relationships and evaluate effectively are far less likely to face this unpleasant task. However, when serious problems cannot be resolved, dismissal becomes a last resort.

Library directors are usually dismissed for poor performance, combined with unwillingness or inability to improve, or for major infractions of policies or library law. Such a situation calls for careful courtesy on the part of the trustees, both for ethical reasons and to prevent possible countercharges.

When considering the termination of the director, the board should review the following questions:

- Has the director received formal appraisal of his work?
- Is there a clear paper trail documenting the problems and the actions the director was expected to take to correct them?
- Is there any evidence that personality clashes or unreasonable biases are a factor in the decision?
- Has the board dealt with problems as they arose?
- Has the director been given a full hearing?
- Has the director received written notification of the dismissal with the reasons for it listed explicitly?

- Have the trustees received appropriate legal advice and is the board prepared to justify its actions?
- Are there any library policies that need to be changed as a result of the situation?
- Has it been determined how the dismissal will be presented to the public?

CONCLUSION:

The relationship between the trustees and the director should be rewarding, to the great benefit of the public library. But it will not be static.

Directors grow and change over time. Their priority projects change over time. They also suffer unexpected disasters and bereavements. Both the library and the director need thoughtful consideration on an annual basis. New plans and policies can keep the library moving forward. Friendly communication, effective evaluation and competitive compensation can help the director grow as a capable and talented administrator.

The library board changes its personality as experienced trustees leave the board and new ones begin their terms. The board and the director should invest time in helping new trustees learn the job, so they can contribute their knowledge and talents to the library's future and so they can work in effective partnership with the library director.