

TRUSTEE TOPICS

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

EFFECTIVE DOCUMENTATION FOR LIBRARY BOARDS

GOAL:

The goal of this article is to help library trustees protect themselves with clear documentation of library board business.

BACKGROUND:

The board needs a clear record of financial transactions, financial reports, board motions and board decisions. The board also needs a file that contains every document connected with any major project.

There have been cases where a library board acted correctly but when they were challenged, they didn't have the documentation to prove that their actions had been proper and official. Complete documentation, accurate minutes and professional budget documents can prevent a challenge from becoming a problem.

ISSUES:

Minutes

The library board must have minutes of every official board meeting and should have brief minutes of every committee meeting as well.

The minutes should be kept by the secretary of the library board. The library director has other responsibilities during the board meetings and should not be asked to keep the minutes as well.

The minutes should reflect every action taken by the board, including the tabling of an issue until the next board meeting.

When the board takes any official action, the minutes should contain the motion, the second, the yea votes, the nay votes and the abstentions.

The minutes should be signed, dated and kept as part of the library's permanent records.

Financial Reports

The board should receive monthly financial reports from the staff. These should include current monthly expenditures from each fund, year-to-date expenditures from each fund, balances remaining and an explanation of any fund transfers.

Large or unexpected expenses should be approved by board motion for the protection of both the board and the staff.

Documentation for Major Projects

Any complex library project that has many details and legal requirements, such as a building program or an automation project, should have a carefully kept paper trail. Someone should be assigned to keep a copy of every document connected with the project, from early planning through completion and evaluation.

The most legally sensitive documents, such as titles, deeds and contracts should be kept in a safe or safety deposit box. Project team members who don't keep a paper trail can find themselves in serious difficulty if legal, logistical or financial controversies arise.

ACTION STEPS:

The board should annually confirm that the director's reports, the board minutes and the financial reports are meeting the trustees' need for information about the library. The library director and/or the board secretary should be aware of any changes needed for clarification.

At the beginning of any major project, the director and the board should plan the documentation for the project.

The library director should take responsibility for making sure the library records are organized and filed. Especially sensitive records should be kept in a safe place.

SOURCES:

Much of the material in this handout was adapted from:

The Kansas Public Library Handbook, Kansas State Library, 1998.

The Kansas Public Library Trustee Handbook, Kansas State Library and the Kansas Regional Library Systems, 1997.