

# **TRUSTEE TOPICS**

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

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF LIBRARY BOARDS AND DIRECTORS**

### **GOAL:**

The goal of this Trustee Topic is to help library trustees understand the major trust and functions of a Kansas library board and the major responsibilities of the library director.

### **BACKGROUND:**

It is very important for the trustees to understand the major functions of the library board and also to understand the major responsibilities of the library director.

Every library director should have a detailed job description that is reviewed once a year. The responsibilities in the job description should be the basis of the director's semi-annual or annual evaluation. It is not appropriate for the trustees to micro-manage the library, taking over management duties that properly belong to the director.

Directors who are not performing to the board's satisfaction should be given very specific objectives to accomplish, but not relieved of their proper responsibilities.

It is equally inappropriate for the director to fail to fully inform the board about the library's projects and priorities and to keep them from doing the work on policy, financial support and advocacy that are an important part of their public trust.

The more the board members know about the library, the more they can contribute to the creation of an excellent public library. A confident and creative director wants to give the board excellent information and is not defensive about considering the trustees' ideas.

The formation of an effective partnership between the board and the director does not happen automatically. Board and staff responsibilities need to be clarified with every new board member and every new director. Even then, there may be occasional problems that will require patient communication to resolve. If they escalate into conflicts, assistance from the regional system or the state library can be helpful.

## Section I - The Statutory Authority of Kansas Library Boards

Public libraries in Kansas are by statute governed under city, county, township, district or regional jurisdiction. The Kansas City, Kansas Public Library is governed by a school district Board of Education.

The Library Board of Directors (also called Trustees) of public libraries occupies a unique position in the provision of municipal services to Kansas citizens. Library boards are the legal entities charged with formulating policy and providing personnel and resources for the operation of the library. Municipal governments are charged with funding the operational budgets created and recommended by local library boards. The unique relationship created by library law in Kansas means that library boards are separated from partisan politics and should consider only the creation and implementation of library services that can be used with confidence by all citizens.

The relationship of local government to the library board must be one of mutual respect. The library board has the official authority to construct the library's budget but they also have a political responsibility to justify the library's expenditures.

The public library trustees of a city library are appointed by a municipality's governing body, although it is best if this is done with

input from the library board and staff. Boards of district libraries are elected boards.

Unless they are exempted by a municipal governing body, library trustees must be residents of the taxing district in which they serve.

Members of the board may not serve as paid staff members. They may do a variety of volunteer work for the library but they should not interfere with the library director's role as manager of library operations.

Section II -The Major Responsibilities of Kansas Board Members are:

- To employ a competent and qualified library director and work for sufficient financial support to provide a qualified staff
- To provide good working conditions and benefits for library staff members, opportunities for training and development and recognition of staff achievements
- To determine and adopt written policies to govern the operation and programs of the library
- To know the community and make sure the library's programs reflect the community's individual needs
- To create and monitor short and long range priorities for the library and secure adequate funds to implement the library's objectives
- To establish, support and participate in planned programs to market the library's services to the community
- To work for adequate financial support for the library, advocating for public support and participating in community fundraising
- To assist in the preparation of the library budget and defend it at budget hearings

- To monitor and finance the care of library facilities
- To plan appropriately for library automation
- To attend board meetings and make sure that accurate records are kept of all board proceedings and actions
- To know local and state laws that impact the library's program and actively support needed library legislation
- To be aware of the services of the Kansas State Library, the Kansas Library Association, the Kansas Library Network Board and the Kansas Regional Library Systems.

Section III - The Major Duties of the Library Director are:

- To manage the operation of the library's programs and services according to established library policies
- To market the library's programs and services so that all community residents are aware of what the library has to offer and the community leaders consider the library essential to the community's quality of life
- To pursue library training and education that will result in the most effective library administration
- To consult with state library and library system consultants when professional assistance is needed
- To hire and supervise staff according to policy and utilize the skills and initiative of the staff members to the library's advantage
- To suggest needed improvements in compensation and working conditions
- To develop the staff development and training programs for the director and the staff members

- To help the board design an effective evaluation process for the director and staff and to maintain position appraisals and up-to-date personnel records for all staff
- To recommend needed policies to the library board and maintain the library's written policies and procedures
- To work with the board, the local government and the community to increase the library's financial support
- To maintain the library's financial records and to give appropriate financial reports to the board
- To obtain the level of formal education appropriate for the library. This is usually KPLACE Certification for smaller public libraries and the MLS degree for libraries that serve more than 8000 people.
- To be aware of and support library legislation in the state and the nation.

#### ACTION STEPS:

- The library board should make sure that each trustee has a job description or the list of major responsibilities when they come on the board.
- The library board should make sure that the library director has a comprehensive and up-to-date job description. The director should review this once a year and recommend needed changes to the board.
- The board and director should design a tool for semi-annual or annual evaluation that will meet the needs of both sides.
- The library board should receive board meeting minutes, financial reports and director's reports before every board meeting.
- The library board and the director should spend some time on planning and reach a consensus on the library's top priorities.

## SOURCES:

The material in this article is derived from material in the 2000 revision of the *Kansas Public Library Standards* and the *Kansas Public Library Trustee Handbook*.