

TRUSTEE CORE SKILL FOUR: Trustees shall be capable of assessing and adopting policies that will result in the effective operation of the library, in accordance with state and local laws and with full respect for the Library Bill of Rights.

## LIBRARY POLICY MANAGEMENT

### Introduction

The best possible protection for both the staff and the board is an effective policy manual. Good policies protect the library board by ensuring that the library will run under the rules and procedures that the board has ratified after thoughtful discussion of the library's needs and of library laws. Good policies will provide consistency, answer controversy and prevent legal problems.

Good policies protect the staff by letting them know how to proceed correctly under a variety of circumstances.

Good policies protect the public by making the rights of library users quite clear and by protecting responsible library users from disturbance by problem patrons.

Every public library should have a library policy manual that covers six essential areas:

- personnel policy
- board policy
- collection management
- information access
- library services
- emergency preparedness.

If a library does not have a policy in a major area, it can be drafted by the library director and a board committee or drafted by the library staff. System consultants can answer questions about policy areas and help with the wording. Sample policies may be obtained and advice on policy issues may be obtained:

- from other libraries through Kanlib-I
- from the regional library system
- from Google searches of the Internet.

but they should always be thoughtfully reviewed and adapted to local needs.

A draft policy should be presented for the library board's review and discussion. The amended policy should be formally adopted by the board before it is added to the policy manual. A policy is not official library policy until it is voted upon by the trustees.

All policies should have accompanying procedures that clarify the actions that should be taken to implement or enforce the policy.

The policy manual and any accompanying procedures should be thoughtfully reviewed and updated by the library board every year. Library staff should keep an ongoing record of outdated policies and issues that are not addressed in the current policies so that these may be appropriately addressed by the board. Online updating and print copies in three-ring binders may make it easier to keep policies truly up-to-date.

All board members should have a copy of the most current library policy manual. Copies of the policies should be kept off-site so that they will be readily available during emergencies.

Each staff member should have a copy of the policy manual. The policy manual should be reviewed by staff and signed by them every year.

A new staff member's supervisor should discuss the policy manual with them in some detail before they begin their new duties.

Changes in the policy manual should be discussed with staff. Even the best policies cannot protect the library if the staff members are not aware of them.

## LIBRARY POLICY AREAS

### Personnel Policy

Staff is the most critical element in excellent library service. Personnel policy is a tool that will help the board build and support the best possible staff. Personnel policy protects staff rights. The policies foster their happiness and job productivity and contributes to their quality of life.

But personnel policy also protects the director and trustees. There are natural limits to the compensation and benefits the board can support and there are standards of behavior they must make clear.

Personnel policy helps the library to comply with personnel law by making these regulations clear to library staff.

A good staff member has no wish to violate policies or procedures for library personnel but they must know what they are.

Personnel policy should cover personnel law, standards of behavior, employment information, appraisal policy and procedures, discipline, compensation, payroll procedures and all forms of leave.

The library board should review personnel policies once a year. All staff members should read and sign off on personnel policies when they start employment and once a year thereafter.

### Board Policy

Some libraries choose to include their materials on board organization, including the bylaws, in their policy manual. Other libraries keep this separately.

However, the library's policies should include some material on trustee ethics. Trustees cannot be expected to serve capably if they do not understand the library's policies on terms, conflict of interest, trustee discretion, staff protection and trustee training.

New trustees should receive all the library's current policies as part of their orientation program.

### Collection Management Policy

The staff needs collection management policy to build a collection that is high quality, balanced, and reflects the community's needs. Policy should also reflect a wide variety of viewpoints, some of which are controversial.

The library's collection management policy should incorporate the Library Bill of Rights, so that it is very clear that the library will purchase, access and support a wide variety of materials and viewpoints, provide free access to ideas and information and free library service to all members of the community. The library's policy and procedures should also clarify the response that will be given when library materials are challenged.

There must be policies that define good reasons for the library's purchases or the staff and board will be vulnerable, not just to criticism but to continuing controversy.

The collection management policy should also define:

- materials the library will NOT buy
- the kind of materials that will be supported through interlibrary loan
- the role that will be played by patron requests and patron reserves in selecting materials
- the support that will be given to materials in different formats
- the library's policy on the confidentiality of library records.

The policy should include weeding and gift policies and should include, or be supplemented by, weeding procedures.

### Information Access Policy

The information access policy should explain that the information resources on the Internet may include material that is offensive to users or illegal under the laws of the state of Kansas.

The policy should specify the Internet filtering practices of the library. It should also specify that the library cannot guarantee that the filters will block all offensive or illegal materials.

The information access policies should cover the permitted uses and scheduling of computer workstations, plus any charges for services such as printing. It should clarify that users shall not:

- access illegal sites as defined by state or federal law
- access sites that contain materials defined in Kansas law as harmful to minors
- interfere with other users or systems
- load or run any software other than that which resides on the library's computers
- tamper with or damage a library's hardware or software
- violate any of the library's policies on computer use.

The information access policy should also make it clear that the library will assume no liability for damage to the user's data, software or hardware.

The information access policy should be readily available to library users and should specify that use of the library's computers constitutes agreement with the library's policy.

### Services Policy

It is critically important that the library have adequate service policies so that library users' rights may be clearly understood and protected.

The staff and board also need protection from problem patrons and people who have political and social agendas for the library. But most library users have no desire to cause problems. They simply don't understand all the library's concerns. Service policies must be supplemented by patient explanation and impeccable courtesy from staff and trustees.

Service policies should cover service hours, lending policies, patron registration, patron behavior, children in the library, meetings in the library and exhibits.

### Emergency Preparedness Policy

While all major library policy is critically important, emergency preparedness has a special urgency:

- A swift and intelligent response to disaster can protect the building from further damage and save materials.
- The library staff members are responsible for the people in the library if there is severe weather, a flood, a sudden fire, building damage, a bomb threat, an illness, a disturbed individual or other disaster. The library may be liable if the staff members are not familiar with clear procedures that will protect the library and the people inside it.
- A swift and intelligent response to a medical emergency can save the individual from unnecessary suffering or damage. The library may be liable if a staff member does not know the library's policies for medical emergencies.

The library staff members simply have to know what to do and who to call BEFORE an emergency or disaster happens. The cost of not having effective emergency preparedness policy can be extremely expensive.

Yet many Kansas public libraries still do not have emergency preparedness policies and procedures and many more have not used them effectively. Library staff should have drills of emergency procedures and be taught to use emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers.

It is largely because of emergency preparedness that policy manuals and procedure handbooks should be kept in the hands of trustees and in secure locations outside the library.

#### Finding Sample Policies

Sample Kansas public library policies are available on the web site of the South Central Kansas Library System at:

<http://sckls.info/sysinfo/libpol/index.html>

Sample library policies designed specifically for small libraries are available at:

<http://www.owlsweb.info/L4L/policies/sample.asp>

The ALA Ethics Statement for Public Library Trustees is available at:

<http://www.evanston.lib.il.us/library/ethics-trustees.html>

The text of the Library Bill of Rights is as follows:

# TRUSTEE CORE SKILL FOUR - HANDOUT

## *Library Bill of Rights*

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services:

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

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Amended February 2, 1961; June 28, 1967; and January 23, 1980  
Inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996,  
by the ALA Council.