

TRUSTEE CORE SKILL ONE: Trustees shall be able to employ and supervise a qualified director and periodically evaluate the director's competence.

THE BOARD AND THE DIRECTOR'S POSITION

Introduction

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.

The State Library of Kansas 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.

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 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, trustees, collections, information access, services 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 members who present policies, procedures and salary schedules for the library board to review, edit and adopt.

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 competitive for the geographical area and the job responsibilities.

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.

The directors should present a self-evaluation of their position and performance for the period under review. The director should present progress with specific library projects and objectives. The director should highlight achievements but should also review obstacles or problems that may be preventing fully satisfactory accomplishments.

Having both the board and the director complete an evaluation of the director's position gives both sides valuable information about the perceptions and priorities of the other. This helps the board solve problems before they escalate into major difficulties.

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?

Both the director and the board should keep in mind that the goal of staff evaluation "is not to prove but to improve." While problems may be discussed during the evaluation, there should be no unpleasant surprises that haven't been addressed before.

There may be 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.

Conducting an Exit Interview with the Director

When a director leaves the library in good standing, whether through career development or retirement, it is good practice for the library board to conduct an exit interview with the director. A great deal of valuable information can be gained from open and candid information from the departing director. This information will help the library board assess where the library is with current priorities before they begin interviewing candidates for the director's position. It will also give the library board information that they can use to work effectively with the new director.

The director should be given the freedom to raise any issues that he or she thinks are important. But before the exit interview takes place, the director should also be given some guidelines on the information the board would like to have. The trustees might pose such questions as:

- What accomplishments are you most proud of?
- What strengths do you think this library has?
- What strengths do you think this library should develop?
- What do you wish the library could have accomplished during your administration?
- Please describe several of the most difficult challenges you encountered during your administration. Is there anything the board could have done to make these situations easier?
- Do you have any suggestions for improved personnel policies or procedures?
- Do you have any suggestions that the board might use to work effectively with the next director?
- What skills and qualities should the board look for in the next director?
- How would you describe the library's service community? What do you think the community will need from the library in the future?
- What do you think this library should accomplish in the next five years?
- Are there any special issues connected with the administration of this library that you think the trustees should be aware of?

All information given by the departing director should be received with impeccable courtesy by the board. The board should review the director's recommendations before conducting the interviews for a new director.

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.

TRUSTEE CORE SKILL ONE - HANDOUT

Key Questions - Legal Interview Questions

What kinds of questions can be asked?

Questions asked in an interview should focus on your qualifications for the job. Although recent legislation helps ensure that you are not asked illegal questions, occasionally these questions come up on an application or in an interview. Human resources personnel are usually aware of what is legal and illegal. However, others involved in the hiring process may not have the same awareness.

It is your right to withhold information unrelated to the job. However, research shows that refusing to answer questions may hurt your employment prospects. Think through possible illegal questions ahead of time and decide how you will handle them. If you are not comfortable answering an illegal question, prepare a suitable answer ahead of time. A suitable answer is one that allows you to maintain your privacy without offending the interviewer.

Listed below are examples of:

- Legal questions
- Legal requests for information after hiring
- Illegal questions
- Questions prohibited by Title I of the ADA

For more information about your legal rights, contact the Minnesota Department of Human Rights or your local Job Service Office. For more information about interview questions in general, go to Key Questions.

Legal questions:

- What education do you have?
- What experience qualifies you for this job?
- Do you have licenses and certifications for this job?
- Are you willing to travel?
- What name(s) are your work records under?
- Do you have the legal right to work in the United States?
- Are you available for overtime?

After hiring, an employer legally may request:

- A copy of your birth certificate
- Affirmative action statistics
- Your marital status (married or single only)
- Proof of citizenship
- Photographs

- Physical examination and drug testing
- Social Security card

Illegal questions:

Some questions are illegal for an employer to ask before a conditional offer of employment. According to the Minnesota Human Rights Act, at Minnesota Statutes, section 363.03, subdivision 1(4)(a), these may include the following questions:

Examples of illegal questions:

- What is your age or date of birth?
- What is your sexual orientation?
- What church do you attend?
- What is your national origin?
- What is your maiden name?
- What is your marital status (Circle one: Ms., Mrs., or Miss)?
- Are you widowed, divorced, or separated?
- What is or was your spouse's name and/or job?
- Have you ever filed a workers' compensation claim?

Title I of ADA lists these additional prohibited questions:

- Have you ever been hospitalized? If so, for what condition?
- Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist? If so, for what condition?
- Is there any health-related reason that you may not be able to perform the job for which you are applying?
- Are you taking any prescribed drugs?
- Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?

Source: *Creative Job Search*
Minnesota Department of Employment
and Economic Development