

TRUSTEE CORE SKILL TWO: Trustees will have the skills to enable the library board to function effectively through good board organization, good documentation and new trustee orientation.

MODULE ONE: RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF TRUSTEES

A strong library board is built with board members who will bring a variety of skills and expertise to the library. The board and director do not appoint new members to the library board but they can work with the appointing official.

The director and the board chair, or another trustee interested in board development, should meet with the appointing official to discuss the skills and qualities the library needs in its trustees. The appointing official should be given job descriptions of the trustee positions and a copy of the same orientation kit that will be given to new trustees. The appointing official should be encouraged to market library board membership as an important job rather than an easy one.

Board recruitment should be regarded as an ongoing commitment. Throughout the year, the director should report to the board members about library users and library supporters who would make good board members. Throughout the year, the trustees should talk to the director about community leaders who would make good board members.

The director and the existing board should all be trained to stay on watch for community residents that would make good board members. Examples might include political leaders, community leaders, successful professional people, successful businessmen, church leaders, organization leaders, active mothers of school age children.

Skills that trustees like to have represented on the library board include:

- accounting skills
- advocacy skills
- business skills
- education background
- fundraising skills
- knowledge of funding issues
- knowledge of tax regulations
- legal knowledge
- marketing and public relations skills
- public speaking skills.

The board should learn who the heavy library users are. They often know the library well and have strong feelings about its public support.

If the community has a major employer, the company's top officials should be considered as board members. They have business skills and they have good reason to care about quality of life for community residents.

The staff of local media can be good board members and effective allies in maintaining public awareness of the library.

Those in the service professions are often overlooked as potential board members. Those who serve the children, the senior citizens and citizens with special needs can offer valuable information about the total community and its information needs. They are also sensitive to the impact of inadequate funding.

In some communities, those who work in the recreational and tourist fields are a resource that should not be overlooked. Not only do they have a different perspective on the community but they often have marketing skills.

If the library has an active and successful Friends group, this can serve as a training ground for library trustees. The Friends group can also be a way for former trustees to remain involved with the library.

Most of the citizens appointed to the library board are capable of being effective board members if they have effective orientation and training. Very rarely, a new board member may have an inappropriate agenda for the budget or the collection. It may take a united board to politely but firmly demonstrate that the commitment to good financial support or intellectual freedom will remain in place.

The position of library trustee should be marketed as a job that is critical to library development and a very important service to the community. Potential board members should not be told that "you just have to attend a monthly meeting." That simply isn't true in any good public library.

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MODULE TWO: ORIENTATION OF NEW TRUSTEES

Once potentially excellent trustees have been appointed to the library board, it is important to give new trustees the information that will help them function as effective board members. A good trustee orientation program is an essential tool in building a good library board.

New members of the library board should be provided with information that will:

- help them feel more comfortable with their duties and responsibilities
- give them confidence as they begin their new job
- get them involved early in their tenure.

If the public library does not have an orientation program for new trustees, the board may appoint a committee to work with staff to develop the procedures and materials. Or the library director may put together an orientation package for the board's review, discussion and formal approval.

Orientation should start as soon as possible after the new member is appointed. This will give the new trustee an opportunity to get to know the library director, the staff and the board chair and to ask questions about the library and its services.

Those who conduct the orientation should keep in mind that adults have different learning styles that must be respected. Extrovert and articulate trustees will derive the most benefit from informal interviews. Others will prefer to absorb written material at their own pace. Pragmatic, task-oriented trustees may be a bit impatient with the orientation package but will learn quickly once the job starts.

New trustees should meet with the library director to learn how the library is:

- defined and supported in state statutes
- organized and governed
- funded and budgeted
- operated day-to-day
- structured to serve the needs of the community
- linked to systems and other libraries
- related to the board of trustees.

New members should meet with trustee representatives to learn about the board's:

- officers and committees
- meeting location and schedule
- responsibilities and expectations
- goals, long-range plans and projects in progress
- accomplishments
- relationship to the library director.

New members should be given a kit that includes:

- list of board members with names, addresses and phone numbers
- bylaws of the board
- minutes of the previous year's board meetings
- staff list, with position descriptions
- library policy manual
- library strategic plan
- most recent annual reports
- statistical reports on circulation and services
- current budget and financial report.

The best and most subtle training tool a new board member can have is a library board that is already functioning efficiently. The new trustee will quickly learn that they must do their homework if they hope to be respected and effective.

Both staff and trustees should be trained to encourage new board members to ask a lot of questions. All questions should be answered in a friendly fashion that will elicit more questions.

Both staff and trustees should be reminded that a new trustee is not only new to their responsibilities but looking at the library with a fresh, new viewpoint. A new trustee often has ideas that prove very valuable to the library.

It is often valuable for the director and/or board chair to conduct an exit interview with trustees who are leaving the board. These trustees can suggest improvements for both the orientation program and the board processes.

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MODULE THREE: EFFECTIVE DOCUMENTATION FOR LIBRARY BOARD BUSINESS

Introduction

The public library is a wonderful place to access information and use materials for recreation, research and learning. But it is also a public institution that must deal with many issues that are socially sensitive.

A vital and progressive public library cannot avoid all problems but the board can minimize the impact of problems by having some effective protections in place. A library is best protected when communication is strong, documentation is complete and public law is followed.

Several kinds of documentation are essential to an effective library.

Bylaws

All library boards need to assure continuity and consistency for their legal, financial and policy making activities. Written bylaws are an accepted tool for doing this. Bylaws cover the basic structure under which the board conducts business.

The bylaws should include:

- library name[s]
- mission statement
- service district
- provision for selection and appointment of trustees
- terms and offices
- duties of standing committees
- provision for special or ad hoc committees
- definition of a quorum
- time, place and responsibility for meetings
- attendance requirements
- provision for calling special meetings
- parliamentary authority
- procedure for amending the bylaws
- dates of adoption and amendments.

At least once every two years, the bylaws should be reviewed for needed changes. The bylaws should also be reviewed when there is any major change in the library's operations or policies.

Sample bylaws are available from the regional library systems or from the State Library of Kansas.

Library Board Meeting Minutes

The best protection the public library board can have, if their actions are ever questioned, is an excellent public record of their actions. The minutes should be kept by the board secretary, not by the library director.

Because the secretary's minutes are the official record of library board action, they should include:

- The purpose of the meeting (whether regular or special), the time, the place, those in attendance and approval of the minutes of the last meeting.
- Complete record of any official action taken by the Board relative to the librarian's report, communications received, the treasurer's report and other business transacted.
- A record of all motions exactly as stated, with specifics on whether the motion was adopted or rejected. Only that information recorded in the minutes can be considered official. The following is a suggested format:

Mr. Jones moved and Mrs. Smith seconded that the board authorize the purchase of additional shelving as recommended by the librarian. The yeas were Tarrant, Jones, Smith and Price. Nays were Archer and Thompson. The motion was carried.

- Record of adjournment. No business may be legally transacted following adjournment.

Once a year, the minutes should be reviewed to see if they provide a complete and accurate record of library board business.

The secretary should also write the official letters of the Board and keep copies filed with other record.

Library Board Financial Reports

The board should review regularly scheduled financial reports. These reports should include current expenditures for each fund, year-to-date expenditures, balances remaining and an explanation of any fund transfers. In many libraries, the board also receives a list of bills that have been paid in the current month. Good budget reports can help the trustees know what the library is doing with its resources.

When the library director's evaluation is done, the documentation provided by the librarian to the board should be assessed and needed improvements requested.

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MODULE FOUR: EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

Nothing will help the board foster and support an excellent public library more than having smooth and productive board meetings, where business is conducted in a timely and efficient manner.

Good trustees will be far more willing to give the library their time when they know the library can be trusted not to waste their valuable time.

There are procedures that will make the board meetings more successful, ensuring that critically important decisions get made in a timely fashion. These include:

Working with an agenda: The agenda should be built around the tasks that need to be accomplished. These should be placed in priority order so that important business can be done early. The agenda should be mailed several days before the meeting with any accompanying documents. Reports should be put in writing and mailed with the agenda whenever possible.

Being Prepared: The information needed for the meeting should be available. Any needed tools (such as a flip chart) should be the responsibility of the chair or the director.

Having Good Bylaws: The bylaws should help the board avoid facing the same issues over and over by providing consistency. They should set rules for participation, such as time limits for speakers, the number for a quorum, how to decide issues when there is disagreement, how often the board meets, who keeps the minutes and other relevant issues.

Having a Consistent Schedule: The meetings should start and end on time. There should be reasonable estimates for how long each agenda item will take and the chair should try to meet these expectations. Each board member should be aware that they are expected to be on time and stay until the end of the meeting. Exceptions to this should be rare.

Having a Policy for Absentees: The board should have a policy for recommending the removal of any board member who is consistently absent without a valid excuse. Three consecutive absences might be the standard for such a policy.

Having an Active Chair: The chair should follow the rules and the agenda, move the discussion along, keep on track, encourage all to participate, review and clarify the issues and be fair to all members.

Being Considerate: It is all right to be assertive, as long as courtesy is observed. All trustees should be listened to attentively and no one should dominate the meeting. There should be time limits on presentations and opinions, if necessary.

Making Assignments Clear: Any action assignments should be reviewed and clarified at the end of the meeting so there is no doubt about who is expected to do what and by when.

Keeping Track of Board Business: Each trustee should receive detailed minutes after each meeting. The chair or someone assigned should make sure that action assignments have been accomplished by a reasonable deadline.

The board minutes should include every action that is taken by the board. Each motion should be stated, with the trustee who made the motion and the board member who made the second. The votes should be recorded, with yes votes, no votes and abstentions.

The trustees and the director should review their meeting procedures once a year to see if any improvements can be made. Library boards have high turnover and board dynamics do change over time.

During the library director's annual evaluation, the trustees should consider whether the director has supplied useful information, kept good records and maintained strong communication with the board. Any requests for changes or improvements should be made with impeccable courtesy.