

Library Board Member Reference Document

The board governs—the staff manages

Governance: Library board members are responsible for the direction of the organization. They make major decision including approving plans and policies. They are responsible for employing a qualified and competent library director. They also have an important advocacy role.

Management: The Director is responsible for the overall operation of the organization, implementing board decisions, and keeping the board informed.

The three legal duties of a Board Member:

Duty of Care—You are responsible to care, to participate actively in making decisions on behalf of the organization, and to exercise your best judgement.

Duty of Loyalty—When acting on behalf of the organization, you must set aside personal and professional interests and put the organization's needs first.

Duty of Obedience—You are responsible for ensuring that the organization remains true to its mission, complying with its governing documents and all applicable federal and state laws.

Why a Citizen Board?

- Isolates library operations from political pressure
- Ensures that the library collection is developed independently of any particular political viewpoint
- Means the library is governed by the same people the library serves—the public

Specific Responsibilities

1. Determine the organization's mission and purpose
2. Select the library director
3. Support and evaluate the library director
4. Ensure effective planning
5. Monitor and strengthen programs and services
6. Ensure adequate financial resources
7. Protect assets and provide financial oversight
8. Build a competent board
9. Ensure legal and ethical integrity
10. Enhance the organization's public standing

Best Practices for Board Meetings:

Have an Agenda: Board chair and library director should work together to create an agenda and share it, along with any related information, to board members approximately 7 days in advance.

Be Punctual: Start and end meetings on time.

Make Decisions: Be sure to make decisions, not just hear updates.

Keep a Record: Make sure someone is taking the minutes of the meeting and they are distributed as quickly as possible after the meeting to update board members who were unable to attend.

Have Fun! Bring food, sit in different seats, read testimonials and thank you notes.

Role of the Board President

The President must find a balance between efficient decision making and allowing full discussion.

The role of the President includes:

- To open the meeting and call members to order at the agreed upon time after legal public notice has been given.
- To recognize members entitled to the floor.
- To ensure that a few members do not dominate discussions. All members should have a chance to be heard.
- To state and put to vote all questions which are moved, and to announce the results of the vote.
- To enforce the observance of order and decorum among members as well as all legal requirements.
- To ensure that the library board members understand the importance of acting as a body not as individuals.

Trustee noun

Trust-ee | /trə'stē/

One to whom something is entrusted.

Library Advocacy

Being a library trustee means that you have been entrusted with the welfare of an important community institution capable of serving everyone in your community. As guardians of the public trust, a trustee's first loyalty is to the library and to the community it serves. Understanding the value of the library and being able to communicate it with decision-makers is one of the most important obligations of a board member.

Bylaws

Bylaws—set of rules established by the library board that govern the board's own activities. Well crafted bylaws help provide for the smooth and effective function of a library board. Library board bylaws must comply with all relevant statutes.

At a minimum, bylaws should indicate:

1. The library board officers to be elected, how they are elected, and the powers and responsibilities for each officer.
2. When the meetings are held, and how meetings are conducted.
3. What committees are appointed, how they are appointed, and what they do.
4. How the bylaws are amended.

Library board bylaws should never prescribe term limits. The municipality making the appointment makes its own decisions regarding terms of their appointees.

Sources

Trustee Essentials: a Handbook for Wisconsin Public Library Trustees

Wisconsin Trustee Training Module: Library Board Powers and Duties

Wisconsin Statutes

Wisconsin Attorney General's Open Meeting Law Compliance Guide

Boardsource.org

American Library Association

WebJunction

Iowa Library Trustee's Handbook