

# BOARD ORGANIZATION

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## **Who's Eligible to be a Library Trustee?**

Trustees are volunteers who are appointed to a term of either five or seven years, and as established in state law, can serve a maximum of two terms. Trustees may be removed from office by the appointing authority for just cause, such as not fulfilling the duties of the office.

In library districts the county or counties' legislative authority(ies) appoint trustees. In regional libraries the contracting authorities make the appointment, and in municipalities the recommendation of the mayor or city manager is usually submitted to the council for approval. Library trustee appointments are non-partisan.

No state law prescribes eligibility. Trustees may serve in other governmental positions if the offices are not incompatible. The Washington State Supreme Court judicial doctrine cites that "Offices are incompatible when the nature and duties of the offices are such as to render it improper, from considerations of public policy, for one person to retain both offices."

## **BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE BOARD THROUGH RECRUITING AND INTERVIEWING**

**Contributed by: Patience Rogge, Board of Trustees  
Jefferson County Rural Library District**

Recruiting talented people is the key to building an effective library board of trustees. If the current board members do not take an active role in recruiting new members and leave the task entirely in the hands of the appointing officials of their city, county, or district, they are derelict in their duty to the library and the taxpayers it serves. Why? Because even the most well meaning appointing officials often do not know what the duties and responsibilities of a library trustee entail. All too often trustee vacancies are filled by pure chance with people who "like to read" rather than by people who are also dedicated to intellectual freedom and have the skills and experience needed to face the challenges of a governing board in the Information Age.

How does a board recruit the right people? I offer as an example the process adopted in 1996 by the Jefferson County Rural Library District Board of Trustees and the Jefferson County Commissioners.

Drawing upon information and materials gathered at library conferences, the Jefferson County trustees devised a plan to help the county commissioners fill future vacancies. The first step was to make absolutely sure that our proposal was legal and then we approached the Chair of the Jefferson County Commissioners. We proposed that the library board could help streamline the trustee appointment process by:

- Advertising the library board vacancies.
- Developing and distributing application forms.
- Supplying potential candidates with job descriptions and background materials.
- Interviewing applicants as a preliminary screening for the county commissioners.
- Submitting a short list of qualified applicants for commissioner consideration.

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This process would save time and ease the task of recruiting and interviewing a large number of candidates before the commissioners carried out their statutory authority to appoint trustees. The chairman agreed to the plan, which the board described in a letter in order to assure that our proposal appeared in the official county commission minutes.

A short time later, one trustee retired and another resigned within the same month. The library advertised the board vacancies through our library newsletter, placed signs on the circulation desk and in the bookmobile, sent a letter to the editor as well as announcements in community columns, and paid for advertisements in our local newspaper.

In order to prepare the necessary paperwork--job description, application form, library information packets, and a standardized set of interview questions--the board reviewed materials garnered at conferences and adapted them to our local needs.

The board follows a uniform process in order to make the interviews as fair and impartial as possible. Each potential applicant receives a packet containing background material on the library including the Materials Selection Policy, Intellectual Freedom Statement, the Trustees' Code of Ethics, our Internet Policy, as well as some history, the current budget narrative, and demographics.

This packet is attached to the application form so all applicants have the same opportunity to learn about the library before the interviews.

About three weeks after the advertised vacancy, the board schedules interviews with every person who submits an application meeting the deadline. Each applicant is interviewed for about 45 minutes, and then we discuss the interview among ourselves for fifteen minutes. The board scores each candidate's answers to a standard set of twelve questions on a one-to-five scale and we then submit the name or names of the highest scorer(s) to the county commission. The board has followed this procedure four times in the last three years. Our board is stronger, more active in spreading the library message, and more committed to providing the best service to our district. Each of us has gained a clearer understanding of the role of the trustee in relation to the role of the director.

The board is always very careful not to infringe on the commissioners' prerogatives. In the past we submitted multiple names that we rated as equally good prospects and the commissioners made the final selection. In 1999 the commission chair informed us that in the future, the commissioners preferred we recommend only one applicant, because it was obvious that we had established an objective process and the board of trustees had proved that they would recommend qualified applicants that the commission could accept!

## **WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A LIBRARY TRUSTEE?**

*(Adapted from the Idaho Library Trustee Manual, A Guide for Public Library Trustees)*

The issues and decisions involved in the administration of the modern public library are varied and complex. Trusteeship is not an honorary position. It is a working relationship with the community, library staff and fellow trustees.

Trustees must devote a great deal of time and express a high level of interest to fulfill their duties. Commitment is the primary qualification for those who serve on the board.

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Effective boards consist of informed, dedicated citizens who represent a cross-section of the community. There is a direct correlation between the quality of library service a community offers and the knowledge, capability, and enthusiasm of its board members.

Effective trustees are citizens who have:

- Readiness to devote time and effort to learning about the library in addition to the duties, responsibilities, and authority of trusteeship.
- Recognition of the importance of the library as a center of information, culture, recreation, and lifelong learning in the community.
- Sound judgment, a sense of fiscal responsibility, legal understanding, and political awareness.
- Skill in board management, an open mind, intellectual curiosity, respect for the opinions of others, and the ability to work cooperatively with others.
- Willingness to become knowledgeable about librarianship including application of standards, identifying trends, and new developments.
- Rapport with the community, including a concerned awareness of diverse social and economical conditions, needs, and interests of all segments of the public.
- Position of leadership in the community, government, business, education, finance, law, or related fields.
- Initiative and ability to plan creatively, to establish policies for effective operation of the library, and to withstand pressures and prejudices when providing impartial service to the patrons.

### **Board Bylaws**

The *Revised Code of Washington* 27.12.210 provides that each governing board shall “Adopt such bylaws, rules, and regulations for their own guidance and for the

Bylaws are the procedural foundation for the board as it transacts its business. Bylaws should clearly describe:

- Purpose of the board of trustees.
- Officers of the board, election method, their authority, duties, and term of office.
- Role of library director in support of board.
- Requirements for board members to remain in good standing, such as attendance at regular and special meetings.
- Cause and process for removal from board membership.
- Meeting quorum.
- Procedural rules for conduct of meetings such as *Robert’s Rules of Order*.

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- Requirements of the state open public meetings laws in relation to study sessions, special meetings, executive sessions, notice to the public, etc.
  - Requirements that implement state public records laws for access to board minutes, policies, planning documents and other materials.
  - Standing committees, their duties, and membership.
  - Provisions for special committees or task forces that may include members in addition to the board.
  - Regular meeting pattern, such as first Friday of each month.
  - Annual timetable for required activities, reports, reviewing bylaws, library policies.
  - Process for amending bylaws.

### **Summary of Recommended Board Officers and Committees**

Usually boards establish the positions of chair, vice-chair, secretary or secretary/treasurer. (See: example Job Descriptions of Board Members and Library Director pages 5.6-5.10)

Some boards establish a number of standing committees such as a budget and finance committee, a buildings and equipment committee, a planning committee, a policy review and development committee, a public relations committee, a personnel committee, etc.

These standing committees, as well as ad hoc committees or task forces, may include appointees that are not board members.

Committees and task forces provide options and recommendations to the board, they do not make the final decisions. The library director is also expected to provide options and recommendations for board consideration.

### **Role of the Library Director in Board Meetings**

The director attends all board meetings, and is usually asked by the board chair to participate in executive sessions.

The library director is responsible for all operations of the library. In order to support the board, the director provides information, research, proposes options, drafts policies or makes other recommendations for board consideration. The director supplies staff work, coordinates major efforts such as a long-range planning process, raises questions, describes programs and assesses both the successes and failures of the library program. The director may provide or arrange for continuing education for trustees.

The chart, *Roles of a Library Board and Library Director* starting on page 2.7 details the complementary roles of trustees and the director.

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## Relationship With the Library Director

The board is charged with establishing policy and long-term plans for the direction of the library. The board hires the library director and delegates to the director the responsibility for managing the library and all of its daily operations. The director implements the policies and direction set by the board.

Planning, policy-making and management are obviously interrelated, but the differences are simply stated: Boards should not run their libraries; they should see that they are run properly. Boards should not attempt to manage their libraries; they must see that the libraries are managed properly. Micromanaging is always a temptation that board members must avoid.

Individual board members have no legal authority over the library. Their authority is derived as a member of the board during official meetings or as an authorized representative of the board.

Mutual understanding and respect between the chair and the library director and the board and the library director make for a successful venture. The consequences of a director who tries to dominate the board will frequently be a power struggle as well as a loss of the strength that a team approach lends to a library. A board that tries to dominate the director, or become involved in daily operations is equally ineffective in building a strong library program.

A healthy board and director relationship is outlined in the *Idaho Library Trustee Manual*:

1. The board and director recognize that each has an important role to play in providing services.
2. The board provides the director with a written job description and evaluates the director's work in a constructive way at least annually.
3. The board does not interfere with the daily operation of the library unless specifically asked by the director. In other words, the board allows the director to do the job s/he was hired to perform.
4. The director keeps the board adequately informed about the operation of the library. S/he recognizes when a decision goes beyond the authority of the staff, and takes these issues to the board.
5. The board solicits the director's opinions about all issues upon which they will act. They will especially ask how a specific decision might impact on the daily operation of the library.
6. The director carries out the policy of the board even if s/he does not agree with it. The director, in other words, recognizes that the board has the ultimate legal authority for the library.
7. When disagreements occur, they are discussed openly and honestly between the board and the director in the board meetings. Neither the board members nor the director discuss these problems with members of the public or the staff behind each other's back.

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## Example: Basic Library Trustee Job Description

### Basic Functions

The board of trustees determines the policies for the library's operation and selects a director to whom the board delegates the authority and responsibility for administration of the library. The board, with the assistance of the director, develops the library's annual funding request, budgets the funds, and authorizes and oversees all major expenditures. The board presents, explains, and defends the library budget to public officials and the general public.

### Organizational Functions

The members of the board of trustees are appointed by county or municipal authorities. The board is responsible for carrying out duties assigned by state law and/or local ordinances. The library director reports to the board of trustees and is accountable to it for the proper fulfillment of assigned responsibilities.

### Duties and Responsibilities of the Trustee

1. Meet at least four times a year or more frequently as required by local ordinance or need to establish library plans, policies, and general direction for the library.
2. Select a schedule of time, dates, and places to meet to review the results of library operations and to establish policies for execution by the director.
3. Elect officers and establish various committees.
4. Evaluate and examine the library's monthly financial report and annual audit to be sure that planning and policy needs are being met.
5. Authorize the director to take specific action as required and to conduct special studies and report the findings to the board.
6. Continually appraise the effectiveness of the director and perform an annual written evaluation of the director.
7. Actively seek funding for the library's needs and services.
8. Continually promote the library in the community and explain policies and services whenever called upon by county council, public officials, or private citizens.

(Adapted from Larry S. Freeman's article, "A Position Description for Public Library Trustees", which appeared in the Fall, 1988 issue of *Public Libraries*, p. 130.)

## Job Descriptions of Board Members and Library Director

(Adapted from *Washington Public Library Trustee Handbook*, 1989.)

### Example: Board Chair Job Description

The chairperson of the board of trustees is elected by board members to provide leadership and to perform the functions that enable the board to conduct its business. The chair conducts meetings in accordance with bylaws and parliamentary procedure. The chair is also the link to the library director and often represents the library to the community events and meetings.

The person elected to the chair should have the leadership ability to:

- Create an atmosphere in which people work productively.
- Organize and coordinate work, delegate assignments, and monitor progress.
- Understand and interpret important factors that clarify discussion and decision-making.
- Communicate clearly and concisely both verbally and in writing.
- Devote time and energy to achieving the mission and goals of the library.

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### Duties and Responsibilities

- Calls to order and presides over all regular, special, executive, and emergency board meetings. Prepares agendas with director, assures that everyone has the chance to be heard and that topics are fully discussed, facilitates discussion of conflicts.
- Assures that the board follows all open meeting laws and public records requirements.
- Appoints permanent and ad hoc committees, giving specific assignments.
- Signs official documents.
- Assures that the board meets annual timelines and requirements.
- Monitors the progress of committees and provides assistance or finds a way to provide additional assistance if needed.
- Works closely with the director between meetings. Does not make interim decisions unless the board voted to give specific authorization.
- As the presiding officer, the chair may work with the library director and others on major issues such as library finance, building projects, or other critical issues.
- As the chief representative of the board, is involved in the Washington Library Association and/or other local, state, regional, or national task forces and committees related to libraries.
- Assures that board members plan continuing education opportunities in order to strengthen the board.
- Acts as chief advocate for the board to the community, to governmental officials and to local organizations.

### **Example: Board Vice-chair Job Description**

As the vice-chair, this position supports the chair in order to:

- Create an atmosphere in which people work productively.
- Help organize and coordinate work, provide assistance with assignments, and monitor progress.

### Duties and Responsibilities

- Conducts board meetings and handles board business in the absence of chair. Presides when chair temporarily vacates the chair.
- If the chair is absent for several meetings the vice-chair will exercise all duties of the chair. If the chairperson is consistently unable to preside at meetings and accomplish the chairperson's duties, the vice-chair may place a discussion item on board agenda requesting the chair to resign or for board members to pass a resolution requesting appointing authorities to dismiss the chair and appoint a new board member.

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- May be delegated responsibility for monitoring progress and providing assistance to committees if the board's workload is heavy, or if there are many deadlines.
  - Like all board members, participates in the Washington Library Association and/or other local, state, regional, or national task forces and committees related to libraries.
  - May represent the board at community meetings, to other governmental units, and to local organizations.

**Example: Board Secretary Job Description**

The library director often acts as the secretary to the board and delegates many duties to staff, however one board member should be appointed to review and certify as needed. The secretary will work closely with the library director to accomplish the responsibilities.

The secretary, or library director, is responsible for, or providing for:

- Accurate board minutes and records that meet the open public records requirements.
- Issuing legal notices for regular, special, executive and/or emergency meetings.
- Maintaining official board records—this includes agendas, minutes, policy handbooks, information on appointment and terms of board members, committee appointments and reports, etc.

In addition the secretary:

- Acts as the board parliamentarian.
- Receives and distributes board correspondence, assuring that the board or library director promptly handles communications.
- May write or edit board communications, studies, reports, resolutions, etc.
- Like all board members, participates in the Washington Library Association and/or other local, state, regional, or national task forces and committees.
- May represent the board at community meetings, to other governmental units, and to local organizations.

**Example: Board Treasurer Job Description**

The treasurer works closely with the library director concerning board evaluation of library financial status, so understanding of fiscal procedures, budget practices, and financial structures is advantageous.

- Chairs the board budget and finance committee that recommends financial goals to the board as a whole.
- May work with director or library fiscal staff to structure the format of fiscal reports presented to the board so the content is clear and exceptions or unusual expenditures are highlighted.
- Like all board members, participates in the Washington Library Association and/or other local, state, regional, or national task forces and committees related to libraries.



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- May represent the board at community meetings, to other governmental units, and to local organizations.

**Example: Library Director Job Description in Support of the Board of Trustees**

The library director is responsible for implementing, administering and evaluating the operations of the library, based on the vision, the mission and other adopted plans and policies of the board of trustees. In addition the director carries out many activities in support of the board. The following lists the latter duties.

- Attends all regular, special and emergency board meetings, usually is invited to attend executive sessions.
- During board meetings, provides information about library status, progress of projects and programs. Provides fiscal and other reports. Evaluates library program, providing statistical and other data, as well as recommendations for board consideration.
- The secretary, or library director, is responsible for, or providing for:  
Accurate board minutes and records that meet the open public records requirements.
- Issues legal notices for regular, special, executive and/or emergency meetings, that meet the open public meetings requirements.
- Maintains official board records—this includes agendas, minutes, policy handbooks, information on appointment and terms of board members, committee appointments, and reports, etc.
- Provides support to and coordinates with board members as well as the standing and ad hoc committees of the board.
- Implements the annual work plan that is developed in conjunction with the board. Accomplishment of the work plan is the basis for board evaluation of the library director.
- Prepares annual budget and background information for consideration of the board. Assures that the board meets all budgeting deadlines and that budget information is submitted to authorities.
- Recommends new or revised policies, usually providing research and draft language for board consideration. Evaluates impact of board-proposed policies on library operations.
- In coordination with board, carries out long-range or strategic planning, building projects, or other major library efforts.
- Assists in planning for, or providing for, continuing education for board members. Orients new board members to library operations.
- Coordinates with Friends of the Library and/or the library foundation, assuring that the board and the organizations communications are frequent, accurate, and up-to-date.

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- Coordinates and works with city or other governmental officials on behalf of the library. In Optional Municipal Code cities, will usually report to the mayor, city manager, or their designate.
  - Develops grant or cooperative proposals for consideration of the board. If approved, implements and evaluates the success of the project.
  - Submits annual statistical report on behalf of the board to the Washington State Library.
  - Represents the library to community, to other governmental units, and to other organizations.
  - Participates in the Washington Library Association and/or other local, state, regional, or national task forces, and committees related to libraries.
  - Performs other work as required.

### **ONE LIBRARY'S EXPERIENCE: FOR A VALUABLE ASSET, CONSIDER THE TRUSTEE EMERITUS**

**Contributed by: Patience Rogge, Trustee  
Jefferson County Rural Library District**

When trustees retire do they turn in their files and fade away, taking with them the institutional history that might prevent your board from repeating mistakes?

In 1997, two veteran trustees of the Jefferson County Rural Library District retired in the space of three months and another's second term was due to expire. Borrowing the idea from the Library Board of Carroll County, Maryland, we established the post of "Trustee Emeritus."

Once the board had determined that it was legal, we amended the bylaws to enable former trustees to serve in a voluntary advisory capacity.

The Trustee Emeritus is appointed by the chair and serves at the pleasure of the board. Attendance at meetings is not mandatory. Although the emeritus has no vote, he/she can participate in deliberations and serve as a board representative on committees that report to the board.

The most important task of the emeritus is to assist in orienting new board members. As a mentor for new trustees, the emeritus provides wisdom and insights that bring neophytes up to speed quickly, thus saving time and helping the board to function efficiently.

Since we instituted the position, our "Trustees Emeriti" have proved to be valuable assets. Their wit, sagacity, and diplomacy have helped the board avoid reinventing-the-wheel more than once.