

# Board Relationships

This material first appeared as a chapter in  
The Ontario Library Trustee's Handbook,  
by Rande Loucks. Revised edition.  
Toronto : OLA Press, ©2001.  
ISBN 0-88969-044-8.  
The book may be purchased from the OLASore  
at [www.accessola.com](http://www.accessola.com).

# 7 THE BOARD AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

In defining what the Board does and what the CEO does, it may help to think of the Board and the staff at opposite ends of a continuum with governance at one end and administration at the other. Both jobs are quite specific, requiring different skills and different information.

Board members are volunteers appointed by the Council to direct the library's operations. As part of the governance role, Board members must liaise with the Municipal Council at the political level. The Board's focus is primarily oriented towards the future.

The CEO on the other hand, is contracted and paid to run the library on a daily basis. The CEO and staff liaise with municipal staff rather than with Council and focus on the daily activities of running the library.

Chapter 5 discussed the Board's major responsibilities. One of these is to delegate authority and resources to staff to run the library. Included in this are a number of responsibilities with respect to the CEO with which the Library Board must be concerned.

## **Responsibility: To hire a CEO**

*The Public Libraries Act, R.S.O. 1990, chapter P 44* directs the Board to appoint a chief executive officer

"who shall have general supervision over and direction of the operations of the public library and its staff, shall attend all Board meetings and shall have the other powers and duties that the Board assigns to him or her from time to time." (Section 15 (2)).

The Board's responsibilities in this process include providing terms of employment for CEO, giving counsel and support to the CEO and evaluating the CEO in regular and a fair manner. The Board is not involved in the hiring of any other staff members.

**Responsibility: To provide the Terms of Reference for employment**

Chief among the terms of reference for the CEO's employment is the job description. This should be reviewed annually and be supplemented by an annual work plan determined jointly by the Board and the CEO that reflects the library's current strategies, goals and objectives. Other items in the terms of reference include hours of work and salary and benefits.

**Responsibility: To provide counsel and support**

Counsel and support are delivered primarily through the development of a comprehensive set of policies and plans for the library. The Board writes policies to give the framework for the operation of the library and to delegate authority to the CEO to act. The Board, along with the CEO, develops plans for the overall direction and long and short-term goals. Policies and plans are monitored and reviewed regularly and revised when necessary.

**Responsibility: To evaluate the CEO regularly and fairly**

CEO evaluation is an important aspect of the Board-CEO relationship. It is essential that the CEO is aware of what is expected of him/her and that the evaluation is carried out in a fair and objective manner. Such an evaluation depends on having several items in place including:

- 1 CEO job description
- 1 annual work plan and goals
- 1 comprehensive policies
- 1 strategic and operational plans

The Board is not involved in the appraisal of any other staff

members.

**Responsibility: To plan for succession**

The Board should also be aware of the necessity of having a plan in place to provide for the emergency succession<sup>11</sup> of the CEO. If a catastrophe were to occur, or if the CEO resigned for

any reason, what would the Board do? Who would take over the day-to-day supervision of the library's activities? This is an important detail to discuss so that a plan of action is in place. One approach is for the Board and CEO to identify one or more senior staff members who are well acquainted with both the management of the library and the activity of the Board to be

prepared in the case of an emergency.

**Responsibility: Communication with the CEO**

The Board and CEO must work together in a dynamic partnership that depends on regular, open communication. Between meetings, this is generally accomplished through regular contact between the Board chairperson and the CEO. This does not mean to say that the chairperson acts as the CEO's supervisor or directs the activity of the CEO. That job belongs to the Board as a whole. However, the CEO and chairperson may discuss many items between meetings. Some are routine matters such as Board correspondence or cheque signatures. Others, especially planning for the next meeting and preparation of Board communications are more formal.

Often, issues arise that need to be brought to the Board by the CEO or the Board may request information on issues already under consideration.

---

What do you want in your staff?  
Gatekeepers or creators of  
your community's gateway  
to the world?

---

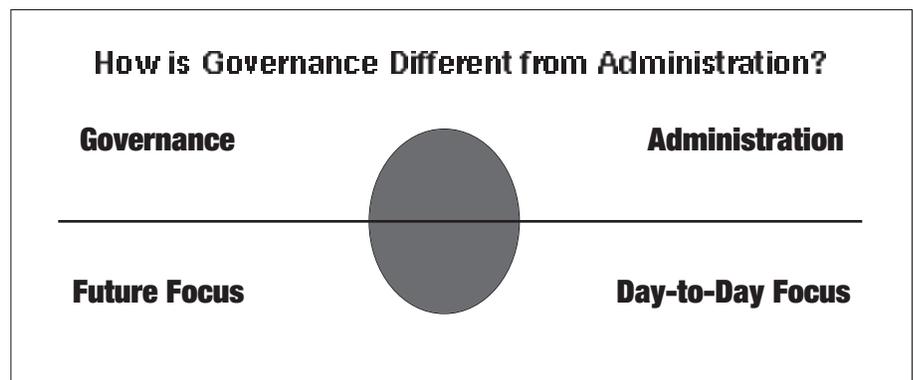
<sup>11</sup> John Carver and Miriam Mayhew Carver. *Reinventing Your Board: A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Policy Governance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997, p. 69.

Part of the CEO's responsibility toward the Board is ensuring that the Board is always informed. Monitoring of policies, reports on operational activity and goal achievement are critical elements of the communication necessary between CEO and Board. It is necessary to devote time to develop open and regular communication between the Board and the CEO.

### **Responsibility: To work at the appropriate level**

Finding the appropriate level of detail and involvement for the Board is sometimes difficult because of the varying degrees of experience individual Board members bring to the job.

Many people come to the Library Board with previous board experience. Board members want to contribute, to do something tangible for the library. Members may be tempted to get involved in management. While it does get Board members "involved," the Board gets drawn into the staff's area of activity. CEOs find the Board's involvement and the confusion in this



area about "who should be doing what" very frustrating. The most useful solution is to define who does what in advance.

The diagram above illustrates the continuum with the shaded part in the centre representing the area of shared responsibility between the Board and the staff. Included here are policy development, planning and such "management" activities as financial control. When both Board and staff have some responsibilities in this area, it is natural for some confusion to

	<b>TRUSTEES</b>	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER</b>
<b>Legal Responsibilities</b>	<p>Know local and provincial laws; respond to new legislation affecting libraries.</p> <p>Ensure that the library keeps complete and accurate records.</p> <p>Legally responsible for the library to the Municipal Council</p>	<p>Knows local and provincial laws; responds to new legislation affecting libraries.</p> <p>Keeps complete and accurate records concerning financing, personnel, inventory, insurance the and annual report.</p> <p>Is legally responsible to the Library Board.</p>
<b>Board Meetings</b>	Attend and participate in all regular and special Board meetings.	
<b>Policy Making</b>	<p>Assess the library needs of the community.</p> <p>Set the mission and overall direction of the library in response to the needs of the community.</p> <p>Approve and participate in the development of the library's goals and objectives.</p> <p>Approve the plan for meeting the Library's goals and objectives.</p> <p>Evaluate the performance of the library annually or more often considering budget vis-à-vis service rendered, library use, personnel and public relations.</p> <p>Determine policies for the library after careful analysis of the Chief Executive Officer's recommendations.</p> <p>Monitor effectiveness of policies.</p>	<p>Assists the Board to assess community needs.</p> <p>Participates in developing the library's goals and objectives.</p> <p>Formulates a plan to meet the library's goals and objectives.</p> <p>Analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the library's operations. Recommends programs and activities.</p> <p>Recommends policies needed, advises board and supplies supporting information.</p> <p>Establishes procedures for implementing policies.</p> <p>Interprets policies and procedures to staff and the public.</p> <p>Administers the library, conforming to established goals.</p>

**TRUSTEES SEE THAT LIBRARIES ARE PROPERLY RUN BUT DO NOT RUN THEM.**

	<b>TRUSTEES</b>	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER</b>
<b>Financial Responsibilities</b>	<p>Analyze preliminary budget request submitted by the Chief Executive Officer; make necessary changes.</p> <p>Explore all ways of increasing the library's income through new sources; determine method to be used.</p> <p>Officially adopt budget and prepare for budget presentation to Municipal Council.</p> <p>Present the budget at Municipal Council and committee meetings as necessary.</p> <p>Ensure that proper financial control measures are in place to expend budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 with due diligence</li> <li>1 according to Board priorities</li> <li>1 as approved by Council.</li> </ul>	<p>Prepares preliminary budget in conjunction with the Board or its committee, based upon present and anticipated needs, and plans.</p> <p>Liaises with municipal treasurer and other municipal staff re the budget.</p> <p>Participates in budget presentation, supplying facts and figures, analysis and comment as requested.</p> <p>Maintains and monitors the budget and attends to problem areas when they arise.</p>
<b>Administration of the Library</b>	<p>Is accountable for the operation of the library through the development and monitoring of policies, plans and budget and the performance of the Chief Executive Officer.</p>	<p>Has full responsibility for administering the library within the framework of policies, plan and budget set by trustees.</p>
<b>Personnel</b>	<p>Employ the Chief Executive Officer.</p> <p>May approve and review senior level staff recommended by Chief Executive Officer.</p> <p>Approve salary scales for staff.</p> <p>Ensure that appropriate steps are taken to handle any grievances that have not been satisfactorily resolved.</p>	<p>Hires and directs subordinate staff members, following Board policies.</p> <p>Negotiates salary scales and working conditions for staff.</p> <p>Handles all grievances and keeps the Board informed.</p>
<b>Community Relations</b>	<p>Advocate the library's services in the community.</p> <p>Advocate the community's needs with the library.</p> <p>Develop and maintain a good working relationship with Municipal Council.</p>	<p>Maintains an active program of public relations, including promoting library services in the community.</p>

**TRUSTEES SEE THAT LIBRARIES ARE WELL MANAGED BUT DO NOT MANAGE THEM.**

result. Consequently, it is important for the Board and the CEO to define who will do what, thereby setting up a division of duties that fall within the shaded area shown on the continuum diagram.

This division of duties should be formalized in policies that indicate the authority the Board delegates to the CEO and defines expectations for CEO performance. This way, the CEO knows what decisions the Board expects her or him to make alone and which decisions require Board input. The Board also has a basis on which to measure effectiveness and demonstrate accountability.

The chart on the previous two pages spells the above concept out in terms of the major responsibility areas. It is clear that the Board plays a "steering" rather than a "rowing"<sup>12</sup> role. This concept is critical to the successful Board-CEO relationship.

The chart on the preceding two pages does not include every potential situation in which role confusion might possibly occur. For example, who is responsible for choosing materials for the library?

The Board may feel that, since it is accountable to the community, it should select the materials that go on the library's shelves. Clearly, though, this is a task for the professional librarians. Board input should come in the form of discussion and debate over the principles that will guide comprehensive selection and collection development policies. The job of the Board is to develop those policies taking into account the advice and expertise of the staff and then approving them to guide the staff in the future. The Board needs to deliberate the values brought to the table by all members of the Board as well as those of the staff and the community and combine these with the expertise of the professionals. Keeping in mind that libraries are built on the principles of Intellectual Freedom and Freedom of Access to the

The role charts on pages 51 and 52 are from the 1986 version of The Ontario Library Trustee's Handbook by Lorraine Williams

<sup>12</sup> "In Search of Effective Governance" (videotape). Ottawa: Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, 1996.

Information, the Board must find the appropriate policy. This is a challenging task but the rewards of a well-run library with a strong framework of policy to support it are well worth the effort.

Similarly, a structure for regular monitoring must also be defined. When a comprehensive set of policies set the parameters of Board and staff roles, it is a relatively simple task for the Board to compare what is actually happening to the requirements set out in the policies. Monitoring policies regularly will provide information for CEO evaluation as well as for demonstrating accountability. In fact, you could say that policy is the cornerstone of good governance.

### **Board Member vs. Service Volunteer**

When there is simply not enough staff to do all the jobs, Board members or other volunteers are called upon to assist. It is extremely important that the roles of "governing Board member" and "service volunteer" remain completely separate. If this is not the case, the resultant blurring of lines of authority can be disastrous to efficient operations and harmonious relationships. It is far too easy for the Board member who is also a service volunteer to slide into an employer role and suggest how a library situation should be handled or for staff to assume that they cannot direct the activities of the service volunteer because the volunteer is a Board member.

## 8 THE BOARD AND THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

The Board may develop many collaborative relationships with partners and other stakeholders, but the relationship with Council is perhaps the most crucial. Following each municipal election, Council appoints a new Library Board. Although the Board is an independent body in the majority of cases (there are a handful of Ontario public libraries that operate with a Committee of Council rather than a Board), it receives the majority of its funding through Council. Furthermore, every Library Board is accountable to Municipal Council for the operations of the library. Since Municipal Council has line-by-line control over the library's budget, a Board needs to develop a solid relationship with Council. The importance of this alliance cannot be stressed enough. It is critical to steer the relationship towards collaboration.

A good relationship with Municipal Council depends on continually monitored and nurtured cooperation, a clear understanding of Council and Board roles and open and frequent communication. Of these, communication is perhaps the most important.

Many Library Boards, especially those in Ontario counties, have a very close relationship both with their municipalities and also with their Councils. Others function very far apart, even to the point of speaking only when a budget request is presented. Those libraries paying special attention to maintaining contact often experience fewer problems working with Council.

In addition to citizen appointees, Municipal Council appoints Councillors to each Ontario Library Board. The Councillor-Board member has a specific liaison role, which allows the

Board to learn about Council's concerns and interests and Council to learn about those of the Library Board. It is important to develop this liaison role by providing information for Councillor-members to report to Council and asking questions about Council's understanding of library issues.

Occasionally, there is some concern that the Councillor-member is on the Board as a watchdog for Council. The Councillor-member on the Library Board has the same roles and responsibilities as any other Library Board member. As in all corporations, each Board member is required to act in the best interest of that organization when acting as a Board member regardless of other affiliations the Board member may have. As has been discussed in an earlier chapter<sup>13</sup>, this poses a problem for Councillors and often requires them to wear two hats.

### **What can the Board do to foster good relations with its Municipal Council?**

Understanding Council's point of view is key to nurturing the Board-Council connection. In order to do this, it is important to realize that Council, too, like the Library Board, represents the entire community. Both governing bodies serve the same public. While individual Councillors may represent a particular ward, the job of Council is to act as a collective body to represent the whole - every citizen. The Council corporation must act for the public good. Consequently, when individual local Boards bring their concerns to Council, Council must consider them in light of the entire community. Once again, the common situation of voting on the library budget is a good example. During the Board's deliberations, the Councillor representative may firmly support the library's requests for additional funds. However, when it comes time to vote on the library budget at Council, the Councillor-Board member may be unable to vote for the library budget when issues for the broader public good are considered. The Library Board feels betrayed and at a loss as to why the Councillor has voted against the library.

---

<sup>13</sup> See pages 30-31.

Realizing that Ontario municipalities have faced severe cutbacks over the last few years, just as the Library Boards have, is critical to this understanding. Coupled with this is constant pressure on Council to reduce, or at least maintain, current taxation levels. At the same time, it is the job of the Library Board, as outlined in the *Public Libraries Act*, R.S.O. 1990, chapter P 44, R.S.O. 1990, Section 20 to provide library service and to secure resources for the library. The Board must find the balance between being a loyal steward and a strong advocate of the library.

### **How can the Library Board make its case to Council?**

The onus is on the Library Board to present a solid case to Council. Since the Board must keep in mind that the library needs and concerns have to be considered in light of the entire community's needs and concerns, there are some techniques that Boards might find useful.

#### **1 Keep Council informed**

Ideas for advising Council of library activities are limited only by the Board's imagination. Regular reports to Council, including submission of Board meeting minutes, will help to keep Council informed. Some Boards even make mini-presentations to Council whenever possible to increase the library's profile. It is important to provide Council with frequent opportunities to learn more about the library and to take part in library activities. Extending invitations to Councils to meet at the library or asking Council members to officiate at library functions are also potential methods. Whatever approaches are chosen, it is important for the Board to devote special attention to planning regular communication with Council.

#### **1 Align library plans with those of Council**

Taking the time to learn Council's plans is another practice Boards find useful in strengthening their voice with Council. Many Boards have had considerable success in aligning library plans with those of the Council. It is especially useful if the

library can be part of the broader community planning process. This makes it easier to emphasize library needs when they are conceived within the context of the whole community.

#### **1 Make compelling budget presentations**

Each year the Board brings its budget request to Council, usually in a formal presentation. Concise information that is well documented and strongly delivered is a very important task for the Board and part of an overall advocacy plan that increases the library's profile with Council.

#### **1 Demonstrate that the library is accountable**

The stricter accountability in today's public sector requires Boards to report on outcomes rather than on activities. It is important that the Library Board focus its attention on areas that will demonstrate its accountability most clearly.

Boards need to know what information to look for that will allow them to fulfill their responsibilities and demonstrate accountability. The policies the Board writes should lead Board members to monitor these aspects carefully. Take financial control as an example. It is common while reviewing a monthly financial report to fall into the trap of questioning the CEO about the amount of money spent on a particular item. The trustee does this with fiduciary responsibility in mind, but may focus on the wrong information. What is critical to accountability on finances is whether the resources spent match the library's priorities and whether the financial condition of the library is sound.

It will also be important to show Council that the library has value and achieves results in the community. Resources that have been used successfully to demonstrate what the public library does for its community include:

- 1 IER Planning, Research and Management Services. *The Library's Contribution to Your Community: a Resource Manual for Libraries to Document their Social and Economic Contribution to the Local Community*. Gloucester: Southern Ontario Library Service, 1998.

- 1 The work of ASM Consultants, a group whose purpose is advanced strategic management for libraries and information providers. For more information, see the ASM web site [<http://www.asm-consultants.com>]

There are a number of practices that will help the Board to demonstrate its accountability to Council and to the community. The annual audit is perhaps the example that most readily comes to mind. Consider these other opportunities for demonstrating accountability<sup>14</sup>:

- 1 Annual report
- 1 Inviting guests to open Board meetings
- 1 Presentations by the Board to Council and community groups
- 1 Newsletters
- 1 News releases
- 1 Information on the library's web site

### 1 Explore common ground

Sometimes situations arise that require additional sensitivity and skill to deal with effectively. What can the Board do in a situation that Council sees itself best equipped to handle, but is, in fact, within the Board's jurisdiction? Perhaps the Council assumes the Library Board's responsibilities to select a new branch site or enforces budget changes that seriously curtail the Board's plans. Such a circumstance may require more than good relations with Council.

The key to dealing with such an eventuality may be found in examining both parties' positions and searching for common aims and concerns about the issue. Explore how both groups might work together by examining the similarities in Board and Council plans and identifying the potential role of the library. The path may be a little clearer if both bodies can identify mutual needs and share a vision.

---

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from C. Oliver et al. *The Policy Governance Fieldbook*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, p. 126.

## 9 THE BOARD AND THE COMMUNITY

In Chapter 4, the notion of the community as the collective owner of the library was put forth. Despite the number of stakeholders, and notwithstanding the accountability owed to Municipal Council, there is one group whose interests must be represented in conducting the business of the library – the taxpayers/residents of the municipality. They are, in effect, the owners. They both own the resources housed within the library facilities and provide, through their taxes, the majority of the funding for library services.

### **What are the Board's responsibilities with respect to the community?**

The Board is accountable to the community owners for careful use of public resources and, therefore, must report on outcomes to the community. Many Boards do this using the format of an annual report. The Board needs to go further, though, and develop an ongoing relationship with the community at large that involves not only reporting on results but also seeking input from the community. This relationship is one that requires constant nurturing in order to maintain the library's profile as a contributor to community life.

---

Is your library a social service? Is it a meeting place? Does it have an impact on your community's economic success?

---

### **1 The Board is responsible for meeting the community's needs for information**

The Board acts as a bridge between the community and the Council regarding the community's information needs. This implies that the Board must seek input from the community through needs assessments and/or surveys repeated at appropriate intervals to allow for judicious future planning.

**1 The Board must communicate with the community as well as with the Council about the value the library provides to the community.**

Many members of the community simply are not aware of what the library can do for them or what a valuable resource the library is. Nevertheless, it is no longer sufficient to advise the community or Council that the library is valuable. The environment of stricter accountability calls for something more tangible. Library Boards are faced with having to prove that the library is of benefit to the community. We all know of "stories" told by patrons about how important the library has been to them – perhaps a mother looking for information on child-rearing finds a resource that helps her to sort out a problem she is having with a child or a senior finds life-saving information about an illness. These are important anecdotes that need to be combined with other results that indicate how the library benefits the community.

**1 The Board must strengthen the library's profile within the community.**

The Board must spend significant time developing this ongoing relationship with the community. This will involve dealing both with users and with non-users and means seizing every opportunity to promote the library and what it offers to the public-at-large. Some libraries are extremely adept at tying into any community-wide event and using that exposure to increase the library's profile.

**What can the Board do to facilitate this relationship?**

The Board must carefully plan and implement its relationship with the community. On a regular basis, and through a variety of means, the Board should seek information on community needs and concerns and input about important issues. With this information in hand, the Board is able to identify the various points of view that patrons and non-patrons express, debate them and write effective policy that is appropriate to the local community. The Board should also ensure that staff makes the library's policies accessible to the public and that

information about library activities is always available.

**What is the effect of a stronger relationship with the community?**

An important side-consequence of a strong connection with the community is that the Board may find new and vocal library supporters and enlist their aid in making presentations to Council. These champions may be called upon to work on behalf of the library on an ad hoc basis or may become a formal organization such as a "Friends of the Library" group; many libraries have benefited greatly from these efforts.

Friends groups have interested library supporters who wish to further the aims of the library by acting as advocates of the library to the Council or other levels of government and the community and/or assisting the library to achieve its aims through raising additional funds. It is important that these formal Friends groups have a clear purpose and remain separate from the Board; however, there must also be a liaison between the Friends group and the Board.

The role of the Friends group is distinct from that of the Board and the staff. Whether its purpose is to raise funds, advocate or both, it can prove to be a valuable ally to the library. Because it is a separate organization comprised of voters in the community, "friends" can have significant impact on the Council.

The number of Friends groups has been increasing and there is a national association called Friends of Canadian Libraries (FOCAL) that provides networking and training opportunities for the many organizations in Canada.