



The Role of the Library Board

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A Library Board is a formal, policy-setting group that exists to set goals and objectives that will meet the community's information needs. Once Board members have considered the legislative and legal responsibilities of serving on the Library Board, what will they do? Stated quite simply, they will govern.

What is governance?

Governance is "the overall processes and structures used to conduct an organization's operations and activities."⁸ The term implies ultimate responsibility and accountability. In other words, the Board is the decision-making and legal authority of the organization.

What is accountability?

Going hand-in-hand with governance is the issue of accountability. Accountability means having to explain and accept responsibility for actually carrying out what the library is there to do.⁹ Because the library belongs to the public, the Board must be able to provide detailed information about how responsibilities have been carried out and what results have been achieved.

Today's more stringent expectations for the accountability of public bodies call for a focus on outcomes rather than a simple report on efforts and activities. The Board is accountable for the whole range of activity of the organization and for the results it achieves, but is not responsible for carrying out everything that is done. The activity of running the organization on a day-to-day basis is a responsibility delegated to the staff.

⁸ This definition is from the final report of the Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector chaired by Ed Broadbent. The report is entitled: "Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector". It is available on the internet at <http://www.pagvs.com>.

⁹ Op. cit.

5 ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD

As a corporation, the Board requires a "constitution and by-laws" to establish its functional framework. These two items provide the body of fundamental principles that govern how the Board operates (constitution) and the specific regulations and procedures (by-laws) to operate the Board. These are "mechanical aspects" of governance and include the name of the Board and purpose of the organization, its seal and symbol and rules for Board composition, officers of the Board, meetings, elections, committees, finances, rules of order, staff, amendments and authority. Much of this information comes directly from the *Public Libraries Act*, R.S.O. 1990, chapter P 44.

The 21st century library is not the reading room of the 19th century. It does require rocket science to fulfil its potential. What an exciting challenge for Boards!

Responsibility: To define the library's purpose and direction

The Board is responsible for determining the purpose of the library and ensuring that it achieves what it is meant to achieve. It must define new directions in response to changing environmental conditions and broadly draft a course of action to be undertaken by staff to meet the needs of the community.

Responsibility: To delegate authority and resources to the staff to run the library

The Board must ensure that the best possible staff is in place and let the staff do the job. This requires the Board to put in place a CEO who is capable of managing the entire operation as well as a comprehensive framework for operations. The Board DOES NOT have direct responsibility

for operations and programming. The Board must, however, ensure that the financial resources are available to provide library service to the community.

Responsibility: To act as a bridge between the library and the Municipal Council and the library and the community

The Board represents the public in its stewardship of the library. The Board works with the staff to determine what the public wants and, in turn, to let the public know what the possibilities of library service are. To do this, the Board must maintain regular contact with the public – with both those who use the library and those who do not. The Board collects data that will guide the Board in setting future directions for the library. In order to achieve future goals, the Board must communicate this information to the Municipal Council and advocate for the necessary resources. It is essential that the Board maintain a close working relationship with the Municipal Council – the library’s major funder and partner.

Responsibility: To report on the library’s effectiveness

The Board must be constantly aware of its requirement to report on the effectiveness of organizational achievement. It must carefully monitor policies and controls and elicit appropriate information to be able to report to Council, the community and the province in a meaningful way. The Board reports on the library’s effectiveness in a variety of ways. Examples include the annual report to Municipal Council and to the community showing the library’s achievement of its annual goals and objectives and the annual audit demonstrating the library’s ability to manage financial resources.

Responsibility: To practice good governance

The Board is responsible for its own operations - those of the Board itself. Included in this are the organization and structure of the Board, how it conducts meetings, its committees and the role of its officers.

6 THE SKILLS THAT TRUSTEES NEED

The responsibilities outlined in the previous section are not simple tasks. They require a number of specialized skill sets in four major activities.

Policy development

Policy development is a key job for the Board of directors. Its critical nature comes from the organization's need for continuity. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the Board exists beyond the tenure of individual Board members and, as such, must provide for the continuing existence of the organization. Because a full complement of policies provides the necessary framework for all of the operations and priorities of the library, it is the chief tool to maintain the library's continuity. A policy framework allows for a smooth transition from old to new Boards. New Board members can step into their jobs without having to start from scratch and the library has a consistent base for ongoing activities.

To be a useful tool policy must be in writing and approved at a duly called Board meeting. Using the input and expertise of the staff, the Board works through a series of stages to debate opinions on various issues and consolidates the collective values¹⁰ and beliefs of the Board, staff and community into the basis of a policy statement. From there, the Board identifies the rules and parameters for action and finally outlines specific procedures that will guide all future action.

The skills necessary for writing policy include the willingness to listen to all sides of an issue and the courage to state beliefs and stand by decisions that are made. The Board must also, however, commit to monitoring and reviewing policy regularly

¹⁰ Carver, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-25. This source provides an excellent discussion of values as the basis of policies.

LIBRARY POLICIES: A SELECTIVE CHECKLIST OF POSSIBLE INCLUSIONS

ADVOCACY

- n Board Role
- n Targets

BY-LAWS

- n Authority
- n Purpose
- n Orientation of new members
- n Meetings
- n Attendance
- n Chairperson
- n Vice-Chairperson
- n Chief Executive Officer
- n Order of Proceedings
- n Conduct of Proceedings
- n Rules of Debate
- n Motions
- n Voting on Motions
- n Committees
- n Financial Year
- n Signing Officers
- n Bank Accounts
- n Reimbursement of Expenses
- n Audit
- n Amendment of bylaws

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- n Goals and objectives
- n Groups to be served
- n Children's area
- n Materials Selection
- n Collection Components
- n Collection maintenance
- n Organization of the Collection
- n Reference service
- n Programming
- n Use of the Library Collection
- n Unattended children
- n Public library/school library liaison
- n School curriculum support
- n Rules

CIRCULATION

- n Hours of service

- n Membership
- n Other types of membership
- n Renewal of membership
- n Responsibilities of membership
- n Confidentiality of patron, circulation records
- n Loans
- n Renewals
- n Fines
- n Lost or damaged materials
- n Reserves
- n Interlibrary Loan
- n Outreach Services

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

- n Purpose of the Collection
- n Goals of the Collection
- n Collection as part of the system
- n Responsibility for the collection
- n Content
- n Type of materials
- n Language
- n Size of the Collection
- n Canadiana
- n Local History
- n Selection criteria
- n Sources of materials
- n Balanced expenditures
- n Weeding
- n Gifts and Donations
- n Suggestions by the Public
- n Composition of the collection
- n Adult Print collection
- n Young Adult
- n Children
- n Other materials
- n Intellectual Freedom
- n Controversial materials
- n Excluded from the collection
- n Children's reading
- n Complaints about the collection
- n Organization of the collection
- n Adoption and review of the policy

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

LIBRARY POLICIES: A SELECTIVE CHECKLIST OF POSSIBLE INCLUSIONS

- n Position on and method of sharing community information among residents
- CUSTOMER SERVICE
- n Treatment of library patrons
- FACILITIES USE
- n General facility use
 - n Community use of library meeting area
 - n Displays and bulletin boards
- GOVERNANCE
- n Code of Conduct
 - n Board Orientation and Education
 - n Recruitment
 - n Role of the Chairperson
- INTER-LIBRARY LOAN
- n Method of provision
- INTERNET: ACCEPTABLE USE
- n Access
 - n Privacy
 - n Acceptable/Unacceptable uses
 - n Responsibility of staff
 - n Responsibility of users
 - n Role of parents or guardians
 - n Number of people allowed at a terminal
 - n Use of personal software
 - n Security
- LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION
- n Objective
 - n Criteria for Selection
 - n Loans
 - n Responsibility for the collection
 - n Patron use
- PERSONNEL
- n Definition
 - n General information
 - n Responsibilities of the Board
- n Job descriptions
 - n Eligibility for employment
 - n Notice of vacancies
 - n Interviewing candidates
 - n Letter of agreement
 - n Date of appointment
 - n Probationary period
 - n Hours of work
 - n Orientation and training
 - n Salary and wages
 - n Salary and wage scales
 - n Benefits
 - n Payroll deductions
 - n Promotion
 - n Statutory holidays
 - n Annual vacation
 - n Leave of absence
 - n Sick leave
 - n Worker's compensation
 - n Performance evaluation
 - n Work outside the library
 - n Training and development of staff
 - n Replacement of staff
 - n Grievances
 - n Disciplinary action
 - n Dismissal of employee
 - n Resignation of employee
 - n Retirement
 - n Memberships in associations
 - n Personnel files
- PROGRAMMING
- n Definition, purpose and requirements
- PUBLIC RELATIONS
- n Role of CEO, Chair and others responsible
 - n Proactive expectations
 - n Specific responsibility for media
- REFERENCE
- n Responsibility for reference service
 - n Types of service offered
 - n Excluded questions
 - n Telephone and fax requests

and to making the revisions necessary to adapt to changing environments.

Planning

The Board's focus must be firmly on the future, rather than on the day-to-day activities of the library. Determining the direction of the organization and deciding how quickly it will take to get there are chief planning functions for the Board. In conjunction with the senior management and armed with the expertise of the staff and the input of the community which the Board represents, the Board develops the mission, goals and objectives that will guide the library's activities into the future. Community input may be gathered in a variety of ways including needs assessment, focus groups, public meetings, etc.

The planning task requires that trustees develop a big-picture approach to their tasks. The Board must also be willing to ensure that the necessary resources are available for the library to be able to achieve its planned results. Whether this means additional funding, a new building or increased professional staff, the Board must plan not only where to go, but also how to get there.

Strategic planning is a technique used by Boards and senior management to focus the library's energy towards achieving its mission and goals over a period of three to five years. It is strategic because it requires the planning team to analyze the changing environment and consider how best to respond to it.

The importance of strategic planning cannot be over-emphasized. Boards often find it difficult to make time for such a future-oriented approach because of the rapid advances libraries are facing, especially with respect to technology. It is critical for the Board to identify a clear vision for library service, based on input from all stakeholders, that will fit within the community's master plan, and then to set priorities and monitor the library's achievements over time.

The skills required to plan include the abilities to think in

The policy checklists on pages 39 and 40 are adapted from material in the *Trillium Policy Manual* OLS-North web site *Trustee Tips* #19

broad, future-oriented terms, to seek and listen to input from all stakeholders, especially those whose interests are being represented, and to translate that input into a comprehensive plan. Also required is a degree of comfort with taking calculated risks to make things happen.

Advocacy

As the body that is ultimately accountable for the operation of the library, the Board must be able to speak for the library to

the public and to the Council. Chief among the advocacy responsibilities the Board must shoulder are securing adequate funding for the library to provide its services, ensuring that there is an adequate physical facility for library service and acquainting the community with the library and its services. Each year, the Board will present the proposed budget to the Municipal Council and lobby for the necessary funds. Similarly, in cases where facilities are inadequate, the Board will lobby and, if necessary, undertake to raise further funds to improve library facilities. Finally, the Board will report on the effectiveness of the library in meeting its goals and objectives, both to the Council and to the community of owners.

How good is your library?
You need to know if your
advocacy is to succeed.
Make sure the things
that matter are measured.
Do not be misled by
statistics. They have
their purpose but they
are only one indicator.

For many years funding and resource development have been the subjects of much discussion in the library community. The rapid advances in computer technology along with increased competition for municipal dollars have strained the resources of many Boards. As a result, they have had to consider raising funds or entering into a variety of activities to increase revenue and thus meet the needs of the community. The discussion, while sometimes controversial, continues. Many Boards have found that community members are happy to support the

library and are enjoying considerable success raising funds. There has also been a gradual increase in the number of fundraising professionals joining the staff of public libraries in Ontario. Fundraising remains a very debated form of advocacy.

Partnerships

To collaborate means to work in partnership. Synonyms for collaboration include "co-operation," teamwork and synergy. It is the synergistic nature of collaboration that makes it most appealing, the notion that working in conjunction with other people, teams or bodies can result in something more than simply the sum of the parts.

While collaborative projects can indeed be exciting, they are almost always extremely challenging. They require significant attention to process as well as to product.

The ability to collaborate depends on strong communication skills, regular contact, trust, a willingness to accept another's point of view, flexibility, adaptability, and the capacity to resolve conflict constructively and build consensus whenever possible.

Partnerships are becoming a common means for Library Boards to achieve outcomes they could otherwise not manage on their own. It is simply not possible for the library to exist in isolation, especially when so many other organizations are also involved in providing information. Many innovative projects have arisen when libraries and community groups pool their talents and resources. Initiatives such as shared facilities between schools and public libraries or municipal service access points housed in public libraries are just two examples of the varied and exciting partnerships emerging in the libraries. Developing and nurturing such partnerships is the mark of a dynamic and forward-thinking Board.