

Choosing An Effective Public Library Board

The legal requirements

The Public Libraries Act and its Regulations, not the Municipal Act, outline the powers and duties of public library boards in Ontario.

Municipal Council is responsible for determining the composition of library boards and for appointing library board trustees immediately following municipal elections and when vacancies occur.

Public library board positions are for four years, concurrent with the term of Municipal Council. Public library boards can be composed of a minimum of five members. Although there is no maximum number, most municipalities have appointed boards of between seven and nine members.

Municipal Council can appoint its own members to the public library board, up to one less than 50% of the total number of library board members. The majority of a library board must be comprised of citizens appointed from the community. County Council has the option of appointing a bare majority of its Councillors.

An advertisement must appear in local newspapers soliciting applicants who are:

- At least 18 years old
- A Canadian citizen
- A resident of the municipality within which the library operates
- Not employed by the library or the municipality



An effective public library board will

- Develop a Strategic Plan to establish goals and objectives for the library system.
- Support ongoing professional development opportunities for its staff and its board members.
- Ensure delivery of significant programs and services that reflect the diversity of the community.
- Provide leadership through supporting the identification and development of emerging local programs.
- Measure the impact of existing community programs and provide library resources and services that will enhance community results.
- Present a budget to the Municipal Council that reflects the library's Strategic Plan and identified community needs.
- Evaluate the performance of the library within the community and adjust its goals and objectives where the needs are not being met.
- Ensure excellent management of the library on behalf of the community within the budget approved by the municipality.

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- Hire the library's Chief Executive Officer and evaluate their performance within the management goals set by the Board.
- Ensure adherence to the Public Libraries Act, its Regulations, and any other legislation affecting the operation of the library within the community.

The qualities needed in a Library Board Member (also referred to as "trustee")

As a potential trustee, you should be:

- Interested in making a difference in the future success of your community.
- Available to attend board and committee meetings and to come prepared to contribute to discussions and decisions.
- Willing to become more aware of the bigger picture by learning about public library issues and concerns at both the provincial and the national levels.
- Prepared to represent the interests, concerns, and attitudes of your community.
- Open to learning about library programs and services that give your community the level of access to information and enrichment that it needs.
- Enthusiastic about working with other board members and the Chief Executive Officer in a team process designed to provide programs and services that meet the greatest number of needs in your community.

- Committed to being an active participant in Board leadership activities in your community.

The selection process

It is recommended that a municipality pass a bylaw to formalize selection procedures for:

- Advertising vacancies.
- Requiring all candidates to attend a mandatory information session.
- Developing criteria for selection of candidates.
- Establishing a selection committee.
- Developing a structured interview process.

Important considerations include:

- Consultation with the existing library board Chair and the Chief Executive Officer to determine the current needs of your community and gaps which may exist in the current board composition.
- Developing a set of questions that all candidates will be asked during the interview to ensure fairness and meaningful comparison of candidates. Your library's Chief Executive Officer is a valuable resource for helping Council develop interview questions.

For more information about effective public library boards visit the Leadership by Design program on Ontario Library Board Association's website.

Contact Us

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