

CHAPTER NINE

9 The Library Board and Library Personnel

The most important determinant of library service quality is the training, experience, attitude, and motivation of the library staff. Developing and maintaining a high-quality library staff requires careful decision-making and cooperation by both the library board and the library director.

Role of the Board / Role of the Director

It is the library director who hires and supervises all other library staff, but the library board has the legal responsibility for establishing the duties and compensation, as well as the personnel policies, for all library staff. If the library is a municipal library with an advisory board, the legal responsibilities for establishing the duties and responsibilities fall to the city/town government unless otherwise delegated to an advisory board under a Memorandum of Understanding agreement.

While both the library board and the library director have significant personnel responsibilities, the library will operate most effectively if the two parties cooperate and communicate on important personnel matters, while avoiding intrusion into each other's area of responsibility. Keep in mind that:

- the library director can and should recommend personnel policy changes, but can implement only policies officially approved by the board.
- the library director has the authority to hire staff to fill positions authorized by the library board and to supervise those staff, but should keep the library board informed of important personnel issues and consult with the board, if possible, before making significant personnel decisions.
- the library board's unsolicited intrusion into the director's responsibility to select and supervise staff can undermine the authority of the director and create discord and disorganization in library operations.

Staff duties and compensation are another area where cooperation is essential. The library board has the legal responsibility for establishing staff duties and compensation, but the director has the responsibility for the day-to-day assignment of staff duties. The library director brings recommendations for changes in staff compensation to the board.

Lines of Communication

While trustees will want to know who the staff are and what they think about the library and its policies, services and collections, trustees must be very careful

to avoid undermining the authority of the director if he/she is going to be able to manage effectively. Trustees should direct staff who have complaints about the director, policies, or materials to discuss the situation with their supervisor or the director. If that does not resolve the issue, the staff should be encouraged to follow the library's grievance or complaint procedure provided in the library's personnel policy. Only in extreme situations should staff complaints go directly to the board.

Since the library board may want input from the staff on certain issues, the board should solicit such input through the director. In addition, the library board may decide to obtain library staff input on the director's performance as part of a formal evaluation process.

Except in unusual circumstances, communication between the library board and library staff about library business should be carried on through the library director. Going behind the director's back undermines the trust necessary for effective and orderly operation of the library.

Staff Compensation Levels

The ability to attract and retain high-quality staff depends partially on competitive and fair wages and benefits for library staff. Compensation for library staff should be competitive with compensation provided by similar-sized libraries in Maine and nationwide. Contact your district consultant for additional information. Compensation for library staff should be in line with other community positions that require similar training and responsibilities.

Personnel Policy

It is the responsibility of the library board to approve a personnel policy for library staff that formally establishes compensation and benefit policies, rules and conditions of employment for library staff, etc. It is important for these policies to be gathered into a written personnel handbook available to all library staff. These written policies ensure that all staff are treated according to the same rules.

Many state and federal laws govern the relationship between employer and employee, and it is essential that the library's personnel policy comply with these laws. Your municipality may have personnel department staff who keep up to date on these laws. Knowledgeable individuals should review all proposed changes in the personnel policy. To simplify maintenance of their personnel policies, many library boards adopt the personnel policy of their municipality as the library personnel policy, subject to those changes approved by the library board. The Maine Association of Nonprofits, a membership driven organization, often is a great source of information in these matters. Municipal libraries in towns without a legal firm under contract who are members of the Maine Municipal Association can turn to their legal department for assistance.

The library board should also approve a salary schedule that covers all staff positions and written job descriptions that list the essential job duties of each staff position, any educational and experience requirements, the physical and mental requirements of the job, and the salary range. Carefully prepared job descriptions will help the library comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which deals with employment issues.

Nonprofit governing boards should also consider purchasing Employment Practices Liability Insurance (EPLI) which covers the organization against claims by workers that their legal rights as employees of the library have been violated.

Continuing Education for Library Staff

It is recommended that the library adequately budget for staff continuing education such as workshops, webinars, conferences and other professional activities, including paid work time for attendance, registration fees, and travel costs.

Sources of Additional Information

- Your district consultant
- Your municipal attorney and municipal human resources officer
- Sample personnel policies on the Maine Library Policy Resource page at www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/policies/
- Annual nationwide Public Library Data Service Statistical Report (PLDS) www.ala.org/pla/publications/plds
- Maine Public Library Statistics www.maine.gov/msl/libs/statistics/
- Maine Public Libraries Sample Job Descriptions www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/jobdesc.shtml
- Maine State employment laws www.maine.gov/labor/labor_laws/
- Federal Laws Prohibiting Job Discrimination: Questions and Answers at www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html
- Sample Personnel Policies for Kentucky Public Libraries <http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/librarypolicies/pages/personnelpolicies.aspx>
- Liberty Center Public Library Personnel Policy [www.libertycenterlibrary.org/sites/default/files/files/personnel_policies/1\).pdf](http://www.libertycenterlibrary.org/sites/default/files/files/personnel_policies/1).pdf)
- Rutherford Public Library Personnel Policy Manual www.rutherfordlibrary.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Rutherford-Public-Library-Personnel-Policy-Manual.pdf

