

CHAPTER SIX

Effective Board Meetings and Trustee Participation

6

Preparation is Key

To a great extent, the work done *before* each library board meeting will determine the effectiveness of the board.

The board president and library director need to work together in preparing materials to be sent out to board members before each meeting. Typically, the library director will contact the library board president to discuss planned agenda subjects (including any items required because of previous board action). (See attached *Sample Board Meeting Agenda*.) The board president is given the opportunity to add agenda items. Board members wishing to have an item brought before the board should contact their board president.

The library director is usually delegated the responsibility for drafting the agenda and other materials to be included in the board mailing. Providing detailed written information to the board before meetings allows board members time to consider carefully the issues to be discussed at the meeting. In addition, mailing written reports to the board prior to the meeting (such as the director's report and any committee reports) will save valuable meeting time for board questions and discussion.

Board members can contribute best if they have taken the time to adequately study the agenda and background materials *before* each meeting. A library board has broad authority to manage the affairs of the library, but it is a collective authority. Individual trustees, regardless of their position on the board, do not have the power to command the services of a library staff member, nor to speak or act on behalf of the library unless they have been specifically granted that authority by a vote of the board.

An important corollary to this concept of collective authority is the need for the board to speak with one voice once a decision has been made. Debate, discussion, and even disagreement over an issue are an important part of policy development and the decision making process. However, every trustee has an ethical obligation to publicly support an adopted board decision.

The First Amendment protects the rights of a trustee who disagrees so strongly with a board decision that he or she must speak out publicly against it. However, in such instances the individual must make it clear to all concerned that they do not represent the library and, indeed, may wish to seriously consider resigning from the board if such action interferes with their ability to effectively fulfill their responsibilities as a trustee.

Library Board Meetings

Meetings are conducted under the rules set forth in the library's by-laws. In order for all trustees to be properly prepared for the meeting, a packet should be mailed or e-mailed to them no less than one week before the meeting date. The packet typically includes the meeting agenda, minutes of the previous meeting, financial reports, the schedule of bills to be paid, proposed personnel actions, committee reports and the director's report. Background information on the issues before the board should be distributed as well. All trustees are expected to come prepared to participate fully in meeting discussions and actions and to be familiar with the activities of the committees to which they are assigned. Using the talents and skills of every board member creates a more cooperative, congenial and productive board.

Regular attendance at board meetings is essential. The Board President and the Library Director should be notified in advance if attendance is not possible. A trustee who misses meetings frequently may not completely understand the issues at hand and valuable meeting time can be lost bringing that trustee back up to speed. An uninformed trustee also cannot make the best possible decision when it comes time to vote. Your board may want to implement an attendance policy. It is a good idea to define in the by-laws what constitutes a satisfactory excuse for absence. (Example: "If any trustee shall fail to attend three consecutive meetings without excuse accepted as satisfactory by the trustees, he shall be deemed to have resigned...") Far too often boards tolerate frequent absences by a board member to the detriment of the board and the library. A successful library board needs every trustee at every meeting. A trustee who has difficulty in regularly attending meetings may wish to seek other opportunities to help the library rather than serving on the board.

The most effective boards concentrate their time and energy on a few issues that will have a major impact on the library's future. Activities that can be completed by individual trustees outside the meeting (such as reading the minutes) should not take up valuable time at a board meeting.

Richard Chait of the Harvard School of Education, an authority on nonprofit boards, states the key concepts this way:

- Focus the board's attention only on issues that really matter;
- Use the board's time and structure to pursue those issues;
- Be certain that the board has the information it needs at the right time;
- Ensure that the board works as an effective corporate unit.

At Meetings

Managing an effective meeting is the duty of the Board President. Effective board meetings can begin with a quick review of the agenda to make sure there is adequate time to cover all items and to modify the order of business if

necessary. Effective board meetings move at an appropriate pace. Time for questions and full discussion is allowed, but the president makes sure discussion remains focused and decisions are reached. The president also needs to ensure that a few members do not dominate discussions, that all members have a chance to be heard, and that accountability for follow through is assigned as needed. Meetings are managed better with ground rules. Every board should develop/review a list of ground rules at the beginning of each year. The list below provides sample ground rules that various committees have used. Your board may wish to incorporate some of these or develop new ones.

- Start and end meetings on time
- Stay on task; no sidebar conversations
- Come prepared and ready to contribute
- Listen to others and don't interrupt
- Be open to hearing other people's perspectives
- Question assumptions
- Make decisions based on clear information
- Identify actions that result from decisions
- Bring closure to decisions
- Be respectful
- Board members will support committee recommendations
- Confidentiality
- Give specific example
- Attack the problem, not the person
- Minutes are approved by the group
- Capture decisions and action items

Board meetings generally should be completed within two hours. If meetings consistently last longer, issues can be referred to committees or the director for further study or tabled for action at subsequent board meetings. Establish an ending time for the meeting and stick to it.

Effective Decision-Making

It is important to keep in mind that legal responsibility for overall library operations rests in the library board, not individual trustees. Therefore, it is important for the board president to use leadership techniques that promote effective group decision-making on the part of the entire library board, not decision-making by a few board members, or the library director, or any other individual.

Board meetings are the place for you to raise questions and make requests of the library director and/or staff. Individual trustees should never make such requests or demands on their own—you are members of a governing body and must act as a body. Yet, as an individual trustee, you should not hesitate to raise concerns or questions at board meetings. By raising questions and/or concerns,

you may help the board avoid rushing into an action without appropriate consideration of all of the ramifications or alternatives.

Closed meetings of the Board of Trustees are justified when discussing disciplinary proceedings against a staff member or personnel evaluations, considerations of the purchase or lease of property until an option is obtained, consultation with counsel regarding settlement strategy in connection with specific pending litigation, or consideration of specific contents of applications for employment or appointment.

When dealing with the public or the media, trustees need not feel pressured in having to come to an immediate decision or make an immediate statement on an issue. Remember that what is said in an open regular public meeting can be quoted in the media. A good rule of thumb is to remember that individual board members should never speak for the whole board and that questions from the media should be referred to the spokesperson for the library whether it be the Chair of the Board of Trustees or the Library Director.

A “public comment” period during the meeting is not required, but it can be a helpful way for the board to hear about particular public concerns or needs. The board should limit itself to answering basic questions from the public and place any matter on a future meeting agenda if additional discussion or deliberation on the issue is needed.

Continuing Trustee Education

Board meetings can be an effective arena for continuing trustee education. For example, time could be set aside at a board meeting to review and discuss one of the sections of the *Maine Public Library Standards* and this handbook. Online webinars on trustee issues are also available on the Maine State Library website. Staff members can be invited to make presentations to inform the board more fully about library operations and services. Outside experts, such as municipal personnel specialists, elected officials, or district consultants, can be invited to make presentations about areas of interest or concern to the library board.

Sources of Additional Information

- *Roberts Rules of Order*, the official site has interpretations of rules of parliamentary procedures and a FAQ section www.robertsrules.com
- *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* by Alice F. Sturgis, revised by the American Institute of Parliamentarians
- Trustee Training Videos (Maine State Library Website) www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/trustees.htm
- Maine Public Library Standards www.maine.gov/msl/libs/standards/
- Sample Board Meeting Agenda (attached)
- Sample Annual Library Board Calendar (attached)
- Sample Board Assessments and Evaluation Forms (attached)

Sample Board Meeting Agenda

Below is a sample board meeting agenda. Maine’s open meetings law requires that the meeting notice include the time, date, place, and subjects to be discussed and/or acted upon at the meeting. The consultants at the Maine State Library recommend that any library that receives **any** public funding follow the guidelines set down under this law *Title 1 General provisions, Chapter 13 Subchapter 1 section 401-411*.

Hometown Public Library Board Meeting Date, Time, Place AGENDA

- Call to Order Board President
- Roll call and introduction of guests Board President
- Consideration of Agenda
- Approval of minutes of previous meeting [Provide copy of minutes to board members in advance of the meeting.]
- Director’s report and statistical report Library Director [Provide copy of reports to board members in advance of the meeting.]
- Financial report Library Director and/or Board Treasurer or Financial Secretary [Provide copy of report to board members in advance of the meeting.]
- Audit and approval of monthly expenditures [Provide list of bills to board members in advance of the meeting.]
- Committee reports or other reports [such as a report on legislative or other statewide issues] [Optional—include on agenda only if there is actually something to report]
- Subject matter of issue to be considered by board [for example, “Consideration of revised library collection development policy”]
- Additional issues to be considered by board [Be reasonably specific about all subject matters to be considered by board.]
- Public comment period [This is not required, but it can be helpful for the board to hear about particular public concerns or needs. To avoid open meetings law violations, the board should limit itself to answering basic questions from the public and place the matter on a future meeting agenda if additional discussion or deliberation on the issue is needed.]
- Board continuing education session to be held to review and discuss [for example] library advocacy
- Roll call vote to hold closed session for board consideration of the performance evaluation and compensation of the library director as authorized by _____
- Reconvene in open session
- Approval of the performance evaluation and compensation of the library director.
- Next meeting scheduled
- Adjournment

Note: Please contact _____ at _____ if you need accommodations to attend the meeting. [Include TDD number, if you have one.]

Sample Annual Library Board Calendar

(Note: The time frame for some of the activities listed below may be different for your library and municipality. Your calendar should reflect your own fiscal year. Of course, your annual calendar should list the dates of your monthly library board meetings.)

January

- Director meets with personnel committee to review his/her annual goals and objectives and progress report on his/her prior year annual goals and objectives [see December].
- Board conducts annual performance review of director.

February

- Nominating committee appointed.
- Appointing authority notified about upcoming expiring board terms and provided with a list of board-recommended appointees.

March

- Annual report reviewed and approved.
- Library long-range plan and technology plan reviewed and revised, if necessary. Discussion of budgetary implications of plan activities that are scheduled for next year.

April

- April 1. Due date for providing prior year usage and expenditure statistics to the state (Annual Report).
- Appointments of new board members made.
- Continue discussion of budget goals/needs for next year.

May

- New member board terms begin.
- Orientation sessions held for new board members.
- Board annual meeting held, board officers elected.
- Director provides board with preliminary recommendations for budget priorities for coming year, and recommended adjustments to staff salary schedule. Board discusses, revises (if necessary), and approves preliminary recommendations for budget priorities for coming year.

June

- Director provides board with draft budget for coming year. Board discusses and directs any needed changes.

July

- Budget and funding request approved for upcoming year.

August

- Discussion of needed trustee continuing education.

September

- Board representatives attend municipal budget hearings to explain and advocate for budget.

October

- Library policies reviewed and revised, if necessary.
- Trustee continuing education session held during meeting.
- Municipality approves library appropriation.

November

- Budget revised, if necessary, based on actual funding approved.
- Library policies reviewed and revised if necessary.
- Long-range planning committee appointed, if necessary, and given charge and timetable.
- Trustee continuing education session held during meeting.

December

- Director provides board with his/her annual goals and objectives and progress report on his/her prior year annual goals and objectives.
- Library policies reviewed and revised, if necessary.
- Trustee continuing education session held during meeting.
- Board Self-Assessment

Sample Board Assessment # 1

Considerations	5 Excellent	4 Good	3 Ave.	2 Fair	1 Poor
board has full and common understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a board					
board members understand the organization's mission and its products / programs					
structural pattern (board, officers, committees, executive and staff) is clear					
board has clear goals and actions resulting from relevant and realistic strategic planning					
board attends to policy-related decisions which effectively guide operational activities of staff					
board receives regular reports on finances/budgets, products/program performance and other important matters					
board helps set fundraising goals and is actively involved in fundraising					
board effectively represents the organization to the community					
board meetings facilitate focus and progress on important organizational matters					
board regularly monitors and evaluates progress on strategic goals and program performance					
board regularly evaluates and develops the library director					
board has approved comprehensive personnel policies which have been reviewed by a qualified professional					
each member of the board feels involved and interested in the board's work					
all necessary skills, stakeholders and diversity are represented on the board					

Please list the three to five points on which you believe the board should focus its attention in the next year. Be as specific as possible in identifying these points.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Source: Free Management Library Website <http://managementhelp.org/boards/documents/bylaws.htm>

Sample Board Assessment # 2 - Individual Trustee Report Card

1. Do you understand and respect the different roles and duties of the library director and the trustee board?
 Yes No
2. Have you attended every board meeting and assigned committee meetings since becoming a trustee?
 Every meeting Missed some Occasionally
3. Do you prepare and study the materials necessary to be a well-informed board participant?
 Always Frequently Occasionally Seldom
4. Do you regularly read at least one library periodical and consult relevant books or pamphlets?
 Yes No
5. Do you strive to be aware of the implications of local, state and national legislation? Do you actively lobby at least on the local and state level?
 Yes No
6. How many library-oriented state and national meetings or library workshops have you attended in the past year?
 6 or more 3 or more 1 or more none
7. How many community events or meetings have you attended as a representative of the library in the last year?
 6 or more 3 or more 1 or more none
8. Do you accompany the director to budget hearings before governing officials and actively work to gain funding from a variety of sources?
 Yes No Sometimes
9. Have you visited your local library in the last month?
 Yes No
10. Have you reviewed the library's policy manual to make sure you understand the rationale for service and need for revision?
 Yes No
11. Have you reviewed the library's goals, objectives and long range plan in the past year?
 Yes No
12. When visiting other cities and other states, do you visit the local library?
 Yes No
13. Do you participate in evaluating the library director annually and discussing board expectations?
 Yes No
14. Have you read Maine library laws and reviewed how these laws affect your responsibilities?
 Yes No
15. Are you a current member of any professional library associations?
 Yes No

Sample Board Assessment # 3

Ranking: 1=always 2=most of the time 3=sometime 4=not often 5=never

	1	2	3	4	5
The board evaluates the library director based on the success of set goals, library’s reputation in the community, and what they see and hear about the library from the public and staff.					
The board stays abreast of the financial status of the library and its funding sources.					
The board ensures that the budget covers goals and directives given to the library director.					
The board requires periodic, written updates from the library director on progress towards the library’s strategic plan and goals.					
The board reviews library programming to ensure that statistically we are meeting patron needs and library goals.					
The board pays more attention to the ends than to the means—to <i>what</i> will be done versus <i>how</i> it will be done.					
The board sets the direction for the library through planning.					
The board uses the mission statement, vision, and values to drive planning choices.					
The board is aware of patron confidentiality as required by Maine statues Maine Statute Title 27, Chapter 4A section 121 Confidentiality of Library Records and ensures when adopting policy that patron information is kept confidential.					
The board is familiar with state and federal laws governing libraries.					
The board has established bylaws to oversee its governance.					
The board has established clear policies to govern and guide library operations.					
The board continually reviews and updates the library’s policies.					
The board safeguards the public’s First Amendment/Intellectual Freedom rights by protecting freedom of access, while also being open to the public’s comments.					
The board is representative of the community of patrons it serves.					
The board is a political advocate for the library message to public policy makers.					

	1	2	3	4	5
The board allows time at each meeting for discussion of emerging issues and trends.					
The board encourages open and dissenting discussion of action items during board meetings.					
The board projects a positive internal image.					
The board projects a positive external image.					
The board reviews and adopts the budget.					
The board adopts the budget after the annual planning is complete and approved by the board.					
The board is clear on what it expects from the library director.					
The board evaluates the library director on an annual basis.					
The board adopts personnel policy.					
The board approves the employee benefit plan.					
The board recognizes staff and volunteers for their accomplishments.					
The board annually assesses its own performance.					
The board has a plan for and program for board member training.					
The board receives information needed to make informed decisions in a timely manner.					
The board had a method in place for the recruitment and recommendation of trustees for open positions.					
The board meeting agenda focuses on action items more than on hearing reports.					

This assessment form is based on a similar form used by the Douglas County Library System (Colorado)

Sample Board Assessment # 4

Trustee Scorecard

Please check the box for those statements you are in total agreement with.

- I know the library’s mission statement and am aware of the strategic plan.
- I am familiar with the board's goals.
- I am familiar with library law as it applies to my library district.
- I am familiar with the board’s bylaws and library policies.
- I attend board meetings regularly.
- I attend committee meetings and effectively participate in the committee process.
- I come to meetings having already read the information relevant to that meeting.
- I understand and am comfortable with the board’s decision-making process during meetings.
- I willingly abide by majority board decisions and support it publicly.
- I treat other board members with respect and listen carefully to their opinions.
- I understand and respect the different roles and duties of the library director and the trustee board.
- I route my requests of staff through the library director.
- I encourage and support the library director in achieving our organization’s goals.
- I visit my library frequently enough to be thoroughly familiar with services and to see potential need.
- I am a member of a civic organization.
- I am a library advocate to civic groups, community organizations and public officials.
- I keep abreast of legislation and the impacts it has on the library community.
- I have established a relationship with my local and state representatives and discuss library issues with them advocating for their support.
- I belong to a state or national library organization and have read issues of state or national library organization journals over the past six months.
- I continually educate myself and have attended at least one library conference or workshop this year.

(If each checked box represents 5 points – all boxes checked would equal 100.)

Strengths: List your most important contributions to the board in both action and discussion over the past year.

Weaknesses: What do you think you haven't done well or need to do better?

Accomplishments: Note here what you came on the board to accomplish. What would success look like?

Opportunities: List areas where you need more information, knowledge or skill in order to meet your own performance expectations.

Detail how you can acquire these needs:

I will ask my director about...

I will talk to another trustee about...

Sample Board Assessment # 5 – Self Evaluation for Individuals

1. Do you understand and respect the different roles and duties of the library director and other members of the board of trustees?
 Yes No
2. Have you attended board meetings and appropriate committee meetings since becoming a trustee?
 Every Meeting Missed Some Occasionally Seldom
3. Do you prepare and study the preparatory materials necessary to be a well-informed board participant?
 Always Frequently Occasionally Seldom
4. Do you regularly read at least one library magazine and consult relevant books or websites?
 Yes No
5. Do you strive to be aware of the implications of local, state, and national legislation? Do you actively lobby at least on the local and state level?
 Yes No
6. How many library district, state meetings, webinars and workshops have you attended in the last year?
 1 or more None
7. How many community events or meetings have you attended as a representative of the library in the last year?
 6 or more 3 or more 1 or more None
8. Do you accompany the director to budget hearings before municipal officials and actively work to gain funding from a variety of sources?
 Yes No
9. Have you visited your library and/or talked to the staff in the last 60 days?
 Yes No
10. Have you toured the library facility to note any changes in the past year?
 Yes No
11. Have you reviewed the library's policy manual to make sure you understand the rationale for service and needs for revision?
 Yes No
12. Have you reviewed the library's goal, objectives, and plans in the past year?
 Yes No
13. When visiting other town/cities and other states, do you visit the local library?
 Yes No
14. Do you evaluate the library director annually and discuss board expectations?
 Yes No
15. Have you read Maine's library laws and public library standards to determine how these affect your responsibilities?
 Yes No

Board Evaluation

1. Does the board operate under a written set of bylaws and follow the laws that govern board operations? Is there an effective committee structure that involves all members in board work?
2. Are board meetings run in a business-like manner with a minimum amount of time devoted to unimportant matters?
3. Does the board meet at a regular time with an agenda and are relevant documents distributed in advance? Are minutes compiled and mailed to members following the meetings?
4. Are arrangements made to make sure the library director attends board meetings and committee meetings?
5. Is there a training or orientation program for new trustees jointly conducted by senior trustees and the library director? Is a local trustee notebook maintained to supplement the state handbook?
6. Does the board work closely with county, municipal and school governing agencies who appoint trustees? Are qualifications and duties clearly stated? Are terms of appointment limited? Does the board represent the whole community?
7. Do board members and each library maintain an up-to-date policy manual?
8. Has the board adopted a written statement of goals and objectives which serve as the basis for services and activities?
9. Is there a step-by-step plan for the future growth and development of the library?
10. Does the board work systematically to assure adequate current and future library funding?
11. Does the board systematically evaluate itself, the director, and library plan annually?
12. Does the board encourage and fund members and staff attendance at local, state, and national library meetings?
13. Is there good communication between the library director, and the board, between the chairman and the members, between the board and related public groups, among various board members?

SOURCE: Georgia Public Library Trustees Handbook. 2d ed. Public Library Services, Georgia Department of Education, 1995.

