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## Section 1: The Job of a Trustee and the Operation of the Board

### 1.1 – *Being a Library Trustee*

New Jersey's public libraries are vital community centers dedicated to lifelong learning. The success and achievements of public libraries depend upon the leadership, commitment and dedication of its trustees. Library trustees have legal and fiduciary obligations to ensure that all public libraries provide the highest quality of library service. These core competencies enumerate skills, qualities and abilities essential for trustees to undertake their duties.

Being a library trustee means that you have been entrusted with the welfare of an important community institution capable of serving everyone in your community. As guardians of the public trust, a trustee's first loyalty is to the library and the community it serves, and not to the municipality. You take an oath of office when you are sworn in as a library trustee that includes the words that you will "faithfully, impartially, and justly perform all of the duties of the office of trustee" to the best of your ability. Please note that throughout this manual we will use the word **trustee** to indicate a member of a library board of trustees or of a county library commission.

#### Online Resources

N.J.S.A. 40A:5-33. Oath taken before assuming office

[http://www.njstatelib.org/services\\_for\\_libraries/resources/library\\_law/page20-2/](http://www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/resources/library_law/page20-2/)

Supplementary Documents: Wording of Oath and who may administer

### 1.2 – *Trustee Core Knowledge*

A trustee knows:

- ◆ organization of the board
- ◆ mission and bylaws of the library
- ◆ library services and available resources
- ◆ information needs and interests of the community
- ◆ how to work effectively in a group
- ◆ services and resources available from the NJ State Library and the NJ Library Trustee Association
- ◆ national library trends, standards and developments
- ◆ library terminology
- ◆ library law
- ◆ legislation affecting libraries and pending legislative developments

### 1.3 – *The Library Board's Job*

It is the job of the board to:

- ◆ support growth of library services to the community, remembering that the goal is not to save the community money but to spend funding wisely for efficient and effective library service
- ◆ advocate for excellence and adequate funding
- ◆ obey all library laws, state and federal laws
- ◆ devise a strategic plan for library services and update it every 3-5 years

- ◆ conduct analyses of the community and its needs, and implement responses to those needs
- ◆ build board policies and procedures to work together effectively on behalf of the community for needed library services
- ◆ Hire a competent, professional library director. Conduct a formal evaluation of that director every year.
- ◆ provide a model of exemplary performance of a public body functioning as a part of government

#### Online Resources

#### Roles & Responsibilities of the Library Trustee

[http://www.njstatelib.org/services\\_for\\_libraries/consulting\\_services/library\\_trustees/](http://www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/consulting_services/library_trustees/)

### **1.4 – The Trustee’s Job**

It is the job of the trustee as an individual to:

- ◆ serve as part of a board on which every trustee participates
- ◆ give the time and attention the job requires
- ◆ study any problems and issues, and contribute to discussions to resolve them
- ◆ retain an individual perspective in order to represent the many groups and individuals in the community
- ◆ contribute to making decisions and accept compromise when valid
- ◆ complete continuing education annually
- ◆ carry news about the library to the community and generate support and enthusiasm among the public
- ◆ reinforce the important role trustees play in governing the library
- ◆ work within the board structure to achieve goals the board has selected
- ◆ insist that the board and staff behave professionally

### **1.5 - Trustee Expectations**

A trustee is expected to:

- ◆ obey library law, state and federal laws
- ◆ support the library and library director
- ◆ attend all regular and special meetings of the board. Plan to avoid conflicts with other activities
- ◆ give time outside of meetings for the work of the board
- ◆ participate in discussions, having read the agenda and material supplied in advance
- ◆ be a member of the board rather than operate individually, but contribute individual opinion and knowledge to decision making
- ◆ stand by decisions of the board, or seek to change them with reason
- ◆ know your library : its mission, goals and objectives; its services and programs; the director and staff members; and budget details
- ◆ promote and represent the library in the community. Be an advocate for library service. Work to make needed services possible
- ◆ know the community – its many groups and elements. Represent the entire community's interests
- ◆ accept assignments for committee work, lobbying, public relations activities, and other

needed tasks

- ◆ identify others in the community interested in libraries and willing to work for them they may be the next trustees. Plan for your succession.

#### Online Resources

Trustee Troubles Online Video Series <http://www.wyominglibraries.org/trusteetrouble.html>

### **1.6 - Personal Characteristics Important in a Trustee**

- ◆ willingness to give time – and having the time to give
- ◆ ability to work with others
- ◆ understanding of the place of the library in government: knowing or learning about budgets, sources of funding, concepts of current library service
- ◆ ability to make speeches, be persuasive, talk to people
- ◆ participation in community groups to represent community needs
- ◆ willingness to share skills (but not to serve in any professional services capacity that might create a conflict of interest, e.g., as the board's attorney)
- ◆ willingness to compromise, but not on ethical questions or legal points. Ability to organize facts and discuss problems calmly
- ◆ willingness to take on assignments
- ◆ having a record of community effectiveness and of achievement in other groups
- ◆ respect for the work of others and the recognition and rewards which good work should bring.

### **1.7 – Personal Characteristics NOT Important in a Trustee**

While there are many skills and characteristics, which you might WANT in a trustee, some are not necessary.

Specific skills such as legal or financial skills. While these backgrounds may be useful in discussions, it is not a best practice for trustees to be the board's practicing attorney or accountant. Conflicts of interests are all too easy when trustees try to play two roles.

Being a reader or a library user. Although being an avid reader and a frequent library user is very desirable, it is not required. What is important is that trustees understand the importance of a library to a community, and know how the community wants to use the library.

Having money. Boards often look for someone who is wealthy. It's far more important to have roots in the community and try to represent that total community than to be able to buy it!

Being a college graduate. Many library trustees have a good educational background, but some of the best are those who recognize the value of education obtained from many sources, especially the library. Hire a professional librarian as the director and let the trustees come from varied backgrounds.

Having special interests. It may sound helpful to put a trustee on a board for a special purpose, but this may not be the case. A trustee who is the resident expert on children's services or vitally interested in resources for business or hooked on computers is valuable only if not deferred to in decisions. Broad interests and representative trustees provide a better base.

## Online Resources

Who Makes a Successful Library Trustee?

[http://www.njstatelib.org/ldb\\_files/imported/Trustees/Trustee\\_Institute/Everyday%20Leadership%20for%20Trustees.pdf](http://www.njstatelib.org/ldb_files/imported/Trustees/Trustee_Institute/Everyday%20Leadership%20for%20Trustees.pdf)

I'm a Trustee, Now What? [http://www.njstatelib.org/ldb\\_files/imported/Trustees/Im\\_a\\_Trustee.pdf](http://www.njstatelib.org/ldb_files/imported/Trustees/Im_a_Trustee.pdf)

### ***1.8 - Trustees Serving in Different Types of New Jersey Libraries***

#### **Municipal Libraries (R.S. 40:54-9)**

Under New Jersey law, a municipal library board of trustees consists of seven to nine members, one of whom is the mayor or other chief executive officer of the municipality, and one of whom is the local superintendent of schools or the principal or highest school official. The latter two statutory ex-officio members may appoint alternates to represent them.

The mayor or other chief executive officer appoints the other five to seven members of the board. At least four of these must be residents of the municipality. Upon the expiration of the term of office of any trustee, the mayor or other chief executive officer appoints a member for a term of five years in the same manner as the original appointment was made. Appointment to a vacancy occurring on the board before the term of that seat expires is filled for the unexpired term only.

#### **Association Libraries**

Under New Jersey law, an association (private) library is governed by a board of trustees incorporated as a non-profit corporation (Title 15A, N.J.S.A.). The corporation (association) determines the method of selection or appointment of trustees.

#### **County Libraries (R.S. 40:33-7)**

Most county libraries are governed by a county library commission consisting of five members appointed by the board of chosen freeholders. Upon expiration of the original appointments, the appointments are made for a five-year term. Vacancies occurring on the commission are filled for the unexpired term only. County libraries serve fourteen counties.

In the event of a charter change in any county having a county library, the board of chosen freeholders may, under the terms of the charter change, terminate the county library commission and appoint a library committee with advisory powers only.

#### **Joint Libraries (R.S. 40:54-29.10)**

Under New Jersey law, the board of trustees of a joint library consists of the mayor or other chief executive officer of each participating municipality, the superintendent of schools or highest school official of each municipality and three citizens appointed by the mayor or other chief executive officer of each municipality. Two of the three citizens must live in the same municipality. The initial appointments are for terms of three, four and five years. Thereafter, the term of the citizen appointment is five years. Vacancies occurring on the board of trustees are filled for the unexpired term only.

## Online Resources

Library Law Establishment and Operation of Libraries:

[http://www.njstatelib.org/services\\_for\\_libraries/resources/library\\_law/#part1](http://www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/resources/library_law/#part1)

Library Structure and Funding:

[http://lss.njstatelib.org/lss\\_files/Library%20Structure%20and%20Funding%20Feb%202014\\_0.ppt](http://lss.njstatelib.org/lss_files/Library%20Structure%20and%20Funding%20Feb%202014_0.ppt)  
[X](#)

### **1.9 – The Operation of a Library Board**

Library boards work because of the leadership abilities and commitment of each member. The most important work of the board is conducted at board meetings. Most importantly, individual trustees have no legal authority over the library. Any change in policy or other governing act must be brought before the entire board. The board only has authority when it makes a group decision in a legally constituted meeting (See Open Public Meetings Law NJSA 10:4-6)

Generally, boards meet monthly at a time convenient for the members. Under New Jersey State law, trustee shall hold their office for five years from the date of appointment and until their successors are appointed.

Every board should have a set of policies and procedures for its own governance and operation just as it does for the operation of the library. These are called bylaws, and they give the board its framework for operation. Bylaws may not supersede state library law and should be reviewed and updated annually. Bylaws are defined as regulations made by a public association for the regulation of its own local or internal affairs and its dealings with others or for the governance of its members.

Online Resources

Sample Bylaws: <http://www.njstatelib.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Sample-By-Laws.doc>

Among the keys to success for a board are:

- ◆ a board composed of trustees giving as equally as possible of time and talent
- ◆ officers following procedures and accepting the leadership role
- ◆ a presiding officer who knows the appropriate use of parliamentary procedure to move meetings and to allow and encourage full participation of every trustee
- ◆ bylaws and procedures which cover typical situations and assign functions
- ◆ meetings held frequently enough to do the work without rush but planned to move along
- ◆ agendas that quickly cover the routine, then proceed to plans, reports and issues
- ◆ minutes that offer a fair and truthful written record of formal actions and decisions
- ◆ a director willing to work with the board to make meetings productive
- ◆ a board that considers the director integral to its actions and achievements
- ◆ a board that welcomes public interest and the media and encourages public attendance at its meetings
- ◆ a board that sees itself as representing and reflecting the community.

### **1.10 - Board Committees**

Many boards find their operations run much more smoothly by creating a structure of subcommittees, consisting of several members (but not enough to constitute a quorum, since, in that case, subcommittee meetings would be subject to the Open Public Meetings Act ). Subcommittees can discuss and investigate matters, then bring them before the entire board for discussion and approval. Board committees are advisory bodies that make

recommendations to the entire board for consideration and action. Some common subcommittees are Finance, Personnel, Building and Grounds, Community Relations, and Policy. These committees are established in the bylaws for such specific purposes as the business of the board requires, and have no other power other than advisory. It is a best practice for committee reports to be written and submitted to the secretary for filing.

### ***1.11 - Policies and Procedures for the Operation of a Board***

A board should accept, adopt and follow orderly means of doing business and carrying out functions and responsibilities.

It is often difficult to distinguish policies from procedures. Generally, **policies** are those statements, which establish firm and usually long-term positions to which the board adheres. **Procedures** are the details or steps that carry out the policies.

If the board does not have a policy manual for its operation, begin by going through the board minutes for motions, which established policies in the past. There may also be a file of policies in the library or in the board files, which can be reviewed and expanded..

In any case, determine what policies are needed for your particular library. Thereafter, the board should use the manual as reference, and review its provisions, revising as necessary.

Boards have multiple members in order to tap the thinking of more than one person. Allow for many opinions but arrive at one conclusion in a concerted action.

The checklist below includes most of the **procedures** a board should adopt for its own efficient operation.

#### **Procedures Relating to the Board**

- ◆ establish regular times, days, dates and places for the meetings and the methods for temporary or permanent changes
- ◆ the agenda: who prepares it and when, how much detail and to whom distributed
- ◆ the minutes: who records minutes, the format, approval procedures and filing as public documents
- ◆ the officers: titles and basic responsibilities, method of naming, terms of office. One way to do this is to create a committee within the board once a year, which will recommend candidates for each office needed that year to the entire board for their vote.
- ◆ the director: relationship to the board, role in board meetings, expectation for reporting
- ◆ legal responsibilities: a listing of those items which the board must handle, use of legal counsel
- ◆ records: records to be kept and access to them
- ◆ reports: required or expected reports from the director according to law and board wishes, reports from committees, reports by trustees on continuing education
- ◆ budget: an outline of the process with a time table, role of the board in the sequence
- ◆ financial: figures the board expects to see. It's not necessary for every board member to review every bill. Rely on staff, the treasurer or a committee.
- ◆ who speaks for the board? It is important to assign the president the responsibility for representing the board, especially to the media.
- ◆ committee job descriptions: for standing and ad hoc committees to establish assignment

- and timetables
- ◆ friends: statement of the board's relationship to the Friends of the Library or library foundation, and vice versa
- ◆ board relations with the library staff
- ◆ volunteers: statement on the use of volunteers. (A separate volunteer manual is suggested if there is a volunteer program).

Boards should add their own practices – if they stand up to the criteria of being useful, fair and effective.

A Policies and Procedures for the Board manual can expedite and enhance the board's operations.

Online Resources

Effective Board Meetings

[http://www.njstatelib.org/ldb\\_files/imported/Trustees/Trustee\\_Institute/EffectiveMeetings.pdf](http://www.njstatelib.org/ldb_files/imported/Trustees/Trustee_Institute/EffectiveMeetings.pdf)

### ***1.12 – Recommending Good, New Trustees***

Some trustees serve for many years on a board, however it is important for a board to think about succession planning. New trustees can provide a fresh perspective and create an infusion of energy and interest, along with an updated technical skillset to the board and library.

When bylaws or community procedures expect limited rather than limitless service, trustees should be prepared to help find their successors. Trustees should help to build the library board with replacements carefully trained and selected.

Boards and librarians usually exercise influence on the selection process even though the decision is that of an appointing body. If trustees have carefully cultivated relations with appointing officials, they will be able to make suggestions when appointments are made.

Boards would do well to talk about the next round of trustees – to think of good people to recommend for appointment – and how to recommend the best possible new board members.

In each community, the specifications will vary depending on the role and status of the library.

### ***1.13 - Helping Governing Bodies Make a Good Selection***

Boards can help appointing officials by describing the kind of person or skillset needed, and boards may even recommend specific persons with proven interest.

It is helpful to talk to appointing officials about the qualifications of board members. What does a trustee do? How much time does it take to be an involved trustee? What are the skills and characteristics most vital in a candidate?

For recommended **Core Competencies for Trustees**, see the Supplementary Documents. This document may be helpful to appointing authorities. Consider giving it to your appointing authorities with a cover letter outlining the importance of effective trustees.

Your influence and that of the director depends on how trustees are seen by the officials.

If your library is running well, serving well, well-regarded by the people with whom officials talk, then the trustees should have a voice in new appointments.

### **1.14 - Sample Library Trustee Job Description**

Even though serving as a trustee or county library commissioner is a volunteer position, it requires the same hard work and willingness to learn as does a paid new job. A written job description may help potential trustees to understand the roles and responsibilities of the position. The following sample job description for a public library trustee shows what should be included.

#### **Summary**

Provides governance for the Public Library; establishes policy; sets goals and objectives; hires and evaluates the director; establishes and monitors the annual budget; signs necessary contracts; exercises such other powers, consistent with the law to foster the effective use and management of the library.

#### **Responsibilities**

- Hires, sets salary, evaluates and supervises a qualified library director to implement board decisions and directions and to carry out day-to-day operation of the library and its programs and services
- Participates in the ongoing responsibilities of the board, including establishment of library policies and planning for current and future library services and programs
- Determines and adopts written policies to govern the operation and services of the library
- Works with director to establish short and long range goals for the library
- Attends all regular and special meetings of the board, and participates in committees and activities as necessary; attends appropriate library functions
- Sets an annual budget and approves expenditure of funds; monitors budget and expenses throughout the year
- Understands pertinent local, state, and federal laws; actively supports library legislation in the state and nation
- Advocates for the interests and needs of the library
- Represents the interests and needs of the community
- Acts as liaison with the public, interpreting and informing local government, media and public of library services and needs
- Lends expertise and experience to the organization
- Maintains knowledge of library issues, laws, and trends, and their implications for library use
- Reviews and signs necessary contracts
- Reports activities to local officials

#### **Qualifications**

- Is interested in the library and its services
- Has the ability and time to participate effectively in board activities and decision making
- Is able to represent varied needs and interests of the community and of the library

- Has strong interpersonal and communication skills
- Has the ability to work with governing bodies, agencies and other libraries
- Has the ability to handle opposition and make decisions in the interest of library service

### **Time Commitment**

- Generally, boards meet monthly at a time convenient for members.
- Under NJ state law, trustees shall hold their office for five years from the date of appointment and until their successors are appointed.
- Special meetings or committee meetings may be called as necessary at times that are convenient to members and that comply with the open public meeting law.

If you have stressed the importance of the library and thus the role of trustees in a community's success, hopefully you will be asked to make recommendations.

If you use your influence to stress the importance of a hard-working, knowledgeable trustee of whom the community can be proud – you'll cause officials to think about appointments. And when the appointment is made, you will have the chance to foster a capable trustee by the example of a working board doing its job on behalf of the community.

### Online Resources

21st Century Library Trends

[http://www.njstatelib.org/services\\_for\\_libraries/consulting\\_services/library\\_trustees/trends/](http://www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/consulting_services/library_trustees/trends/)

Trustee Core Knowledge

[http://www.njstatelib.org/services\\_for\\_libraries/consulting\\_services/library\\_trustees/core\\_knowledge/](http://www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/consulting_services/library_trustees/core_knowledge/)