



# THE BOARD CHAIR



A RESOURCE FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY CHAIRS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA



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British Columbia Library Trustees' Association (BCLTA)

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British Columbia Library Trustees' Association

Chair Handbook

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# Introduction

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The BC Library Trustees' Association (BCLTA) represents over 65 library boards and more than 650 library trustees who volunteer their time on library boards throughout the province. Its mission is

*“to develop and support library trustees to advance public library service in British Columbia.”*

This handbook is one of many services provided by the BCLTA to ensure that board members are fully cognizant of their rights, roles and responsibilities and able to carry out their mandate on behalf of their communities.

The role of the chair is critical to the success of the board. The chair is responsible for ensuring that the planning process occurs on a regular and continual basis, for ensuring that the director or CEO is focused and accountable for implementing the board's strategic directions, and for ensuring that the board is structured and works in a way that moves the library forward for the benefit of the community. The chair is also the public face of the board and thus of the library.

## **This handbook assumes a few prior activities:**

- An **orientation** for all board members to their library/system from the library director, including, *as a minimum*:
  - An introduction to senior staff and tour of the facilities;
  - A manual of current policies and procedures, including by-laws;
  - A copy of the *Library Act* for British Columbia;
  - Copies of the previous five years' annual reports;
  - An overview of services considered “core” by previous boards and any innovative programs and services;
  - An outline of indicators of library success with trend data for five years;
  - A discussion of current trends and issues in public library service provision and delivery; and
  - Data for changing demographics and service needs in your community.
- Participation in the highly successful Trustee Orientation Program (TOP); the TOP sessions are one day in length, typically on a weekend, and are presented throughout the province by experienced trustees on request to individual boards and groups of boards; they are also available online in 19 modules.



To access the program online, visit <http://bcita.invokemedia.com>.

## Summary

The online program is divided into two main sections:

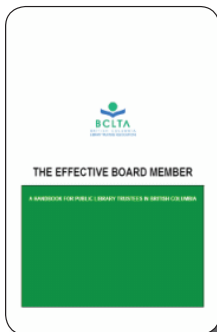
**Unit I – Background and Current Context for Public Libraries in BC** is ideal for new trustees as it describes the overall context for public libraries and then focuses more specifically on basic trustee roles and responsibilities.

- Chapter 1 - Brief History and Current Context of Public Libraries in BC
- Chapter 2 - Roles of Public Libraries
- Chapter 3 - Types of Public Libraries
- Chapter 4 - Other Types of Libraries
- Chapter 5 - Core Values
- Chapter 6 - BC Legislative and Support Framework
- Chapter 7 - Library Boards - Basic Roles and Responsibilities

**Unit II Board Effectiveness and Leadership** will appeal to both new and experienced trustees as it describes in detail the characteristics of effective boards.

- Chapter 1 - Overview of Factors in Board Effectiveness
- Chapter 2 - Mission and Purpose
- Chapter 3 - Select/Support/Evaluate the CEO
- Chapter 4 - Articulate Roles and Responsibilities
- Chapter 5 - Plan Strategically/Allocate Resources
- Chapter 6 - Monitor and Evaluate
- Chapter 7 - Public Standing and Credibility
- Chapter 8 - Maintain Legal and Ethical Integrity
- Chapter 9 - Board Recruitment
- Chapter 10 - Community Development Outcomes
- Chapter 11 - Summary
- Chapter 12 - Summary - Effective Boards

- **Ongoing training and support** for trustees through a shared responsibility of the municipality, the board, and particularly the chair, and the BCLTA through annual conferences and workshops.
- **Familiarity with THE EFFECTIVE BOARD MEMBER: A HANDBOOK FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY TRUSTEES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**, for which this is a companion piece.



The contents of **The Effective Board Member** follow, as they will be referenced in this document.

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# Board Effectiveness

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The Institute on Governance, a federally funded research agency, has conducted several studies on the effectiveness of not-for-profit boards. The essence of their work is reported in **The Effective Board Member**. For the chair, however, these are more than a passing interest as the chair, to a considerable extent, is responsible for ensuring that the core elements are in place.

These characteristics do not happen by chance. They are the result of careful planning and execution by the chair in concert with the CEO/director and the board as a whole.

- Vision: planning the future (you have a bold vision for the library's contribution to community development);
- Destination: having clear goals and a road map (the board has the goals and objectives to realize the vision);
- Resources: acquiring the necessary resources (and working with the director to allocate those resources to achieve the stated goals);
- Monitoring: assessing progress and impact of services and programs (not simply numbers but also the outcome or impact on community development);
- Accountability: auditing; determining efficiency; reporting to stakeholders.

## Consider your role as chair:

You ensure that the planning process is in place. You have stated policy and written procedures. If not, you work with the CEO and the board to develop this framework and then insist that planning processes and timelines are followed.

You ensure that the strategic directions have achievable objectives that are "smart" (specific, measurable, action-oriented rather than "ongoing", relevant to your directions and timed). If you do not do this, how do you fairly assess the work of the CEO and fairly describe the board as moving the community forward?

A key role of the board is achieving sustainable and sustaining resources. Some call this the advocacy piece of the board's work. More importantly, these resources are allocated to board strategic directions and objectives. If the money does not follow the priorities, the planning process was possibly only window dressing.

As the public face of the board, the chair ensures that the system is monitored, reviewed and assessed and that programs and services are achieving their stated ends. This is reported fully and accurately to the community through the annual report, public presentations and reports of funders.

## *The Keys to Board Success:*

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- Strong board and staff leadership;
- Positive working relationships with the director;
- Role clarity between the board and director;
- Agreement on values, mission, objectives;
- Respect for norms, policies, teamwork;
- Good board development practices;
- Regular assessment of the board; of the director; of the library;
- High levels of trust; low levels of interpersonal conflict;
- Constructive resolution of conflicts and conflicts of interest;
- Balance between stability, flexibility, innovation and enterprise;
- Consensus or near-consensus decision-making;
- Effective management of meetings and board work.

Study after study identifies these issues as specific concerns of boards, yet rarely is time spent addressing them at the board table or in workshops and retreats. Too much time is spent on reviewing the previous month or dealing with the “urgent” issues rather than understanding the important elements of the board’s role.



## ***Major Concerns of Boards:***

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- Trustee liability (What is your status? Where is it written?)
- Financial viability (What is your prognosis for the next three to five years? How does this fit with your strategic plans?)
- Adopting business-like practices while maintaining values (Why is the term “customer” a symbol of business? Why do we discuss quality “customer” service but problem “patrons”? Is marketing any more than understanding the different segments of your population and how to meet their needs and desires?)
- How to add value to the organization (How does your board add value? What would be the implication of not having a board but simply a municipal department?)
- How do you balance the need to know about (but not interfere with) operations where you have staff in place to do the job and the need to focus on making good policy decisions, which is your job?
- Succession planning for board and staff (What is your succession plan for your CEO? Is there a plan for senior staff development? What is the plan for trustee recruitment? Who is responsible?)
- Strengthening board orientation and training (The better the training the better the board... and the chair is the lead trainer...)
- Developing role clarity (board and senior management)
- Planning/collaboration (How do you focus on the future, combining your knowledge of community and stakeholders with staff knowledge of possibilities and limitations?)
- Improving measurement of board, CEO and organizational performance (Boards are getting better at planning, getting better at clarifying roles with the CEO in planning and implementation, but how do we work together to ensure fair, open, transparent, objective evaluation of our performance and that of our staff and programs?)
- Improving communication with stakeholders (planned, deliberate, sustained relationship with mayor and council and lead donors and funders)

## ***Signs of Boards in Trouble***

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**Boards in trouble tend to exhibit these characteristics:**

- Excessive turnover of directors and trustees;
- Difficulty recruiting credible trustees;
- Role confusion between the board and director;
- Low attendance/participation at meetings;
- Poor management of meetings;
- Factional underground communication;
- Unresolved conflict;
- Failure to address conflicts of interest;
- Decision deadlock;
- Disrespect for organizational norms and policies;
- Poor communication with funders and key stakeholders.

Through specific actions and concerted planning, the chair ensures that successes are feasible and concerns addressed.

## ***Board Structure***

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There are many ways to structure your library board. The most appropriate committee structure for your board is one that facilitates the board carrying out its role and responsibilities without becoming focused on operations. The board's role is to provide an oversight to management, not duplicate its functions. As well, the board structure should reflect the unique functions and responsibilities of the board itself.

Having said this, many library boards structure their committees around a combination of operational and board functions. Most boards have three or more committees, which may include the following:

**Finance and Audit:** Focusing on appropriate policies, procedures and controls to maintain fiscal integrity and reporting; oversight of regular external audits, including in-depth examination of particular areas.

**Human Resources:** Focusing on the performance review for the director (including establishing annual goals, preparing the review, etc.); providing personnel policies.

**Facilities:** Providing the director with direction and setting priorities for significant maintenance and capital projects with a long-term perspective.

**Public Relations/Advocacy:** Ensuring policies are in place to develop community support; identifying the role of the board with various stakeholders; developing an advocacy plan for the board (e.g., developing relationships with key stakeholders).

**Governance:** Focusing on board effectiveness, annual assessments of board performance, trustee orientation and training, recruitment of new trustees.

**Policy and Planning:** Focusing on policy gaps, regular policy reviews, and the planning function of the board.

**Program Monitoring and Impact:** Focusing on the effect of the resources allocated to specific programs, ranging from a summer reading for children program to support for home-based businesses; working with staff to evaluate outcomes and impacts in different areas over time.

Clear terms of reference for each committee should be part of your board's policy manual.

# Role of the Chair

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**If the board has three primary roles:**

1. set strategic directions;
2. hire/evaluate the director to implement #1; and
3. ensure monitoring and auditing of implementation and outcomes (the what, not the how)

**Then it should follow that the chair also has three primary responsibilities, which mirror those board roles:**

1. effective and efficient board governance, including structure, work plans and meetings;
2. supervision of the director; and
3. public face of the board and the system.

**This means that the chair:**

- Is knowledgeable about alternative means of organizing the board's work through committees and task groups.
- Is skilled in managing meetings.
- Takes seriously the responsibility of mentoring and supporting as well as assessing the performance of the director (one assumes again a stated policy with written procedures). Note here that directors have three primary audiences: the board; the library; the community. Typically, the job is divided almost into three equal slots of time. When evaluating the director, the board needs to collect evidence from time to time from the library and from the community; this needs to be done during periods of formal evaluation and with integrity, fairness and objectivity.
- Ensures that planning takes place, monitoring takes place, and reporting to the community is appropriate (see, for example, the section on the annual report in The Effective Board Member);
- Maintains a positive and productive working relationship with the mayor, while board members liaise and work with individual councillors and the director with the municipal manager;
- Is comfortable speaking with groups, agencies and the media about and on behalf of the library.

## ***Characteristics of Effective Chairs***

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**What then are the reasonable job characteristics of chairs? Typically, effective chairs:**

- Lead;
- Train;
- Accept challenges;
- Act for more than individual good;
- Demonstrate integrity;
- Delegate;
- Speak for the board and the system.

**These characteristics require certain personal attributes:**

- Attitude: positive, can-do;
- Accountability: for board assets and weaknesses;
- Individual and group dynamics: building relationships; maintaining dignity; recognizing and supporting egos;
- Facilitation: guide and help to find answers; manage effective meetings.

**Successful chairs then demonstrate these characteristics:**

- Committed, has integrity (keeps word);
- Provides helpful information;
- Maintains structure for the board's work;
- Shows respect and consideration;
- Facilitates interactions;
- Ensures that the board speaks with one voice;
- Evaluates the organization (or at least ensures that this is done);
- Controls management's job without meddling.

## ***The Position Profile***

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If one were advertising for a board chair, using the same basic criteria as for a CEO, a position profile might look like this:

### **Wanted: Board Chair**

#### **Position Profile for the Chair:**

You want to leave your footprint.

You thrive in complex environments. You are respectful of individual differences while committed to quality and moving the system and your team forward.

You take the broad view: you seek to position the library as an agent for community development.

Passionate, articulate, committed, accountable... you welcome the opportunity to interact with community leaders and representatives; to tell the library's story and to connect political and social agendas. You are comfortable with parents' groups and the Chamber of Commerce.

Ideally, you are experienced in your community's affairs and are capable of building community assets by focusing, repositioning and leveraging the library's resources for the good of all.

**Daunting?** Yes, but critical to board and library success. The chair leads, trains, delegates, readily accepts challenges, acts with integrity and for more than individual good, and is the spokesperson for the board and the library.

Effective chairs are committed, keep their word, maintain an effective structure for the board's work, show respect and consideration, provide helpful information, facilitate interactions, control management's job without meddling, evaluate the organization, and see that the board speaks with one voice. Only the chair speaks for the library, not individual trustees, and not the director other than for day-to-day management issues.

## *The Chair as Trainer and Board Developer*

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Trustees in British Columbia identified these areas for essential training to be able to do their job effectively. They suggested that primary responsibility for either leading the training or organizing the training rested with the board chair.

Chairs ensure that their boards have current and accurate information and opportunities to learn more about:

- board authority, measures of integrity; board organization and structure; role of the chair; effective meetings;
- role of the director in relation to the board; performance measures for the director; hiring the director; supervising the director; evaluating the director; succession planning; management reviews of specific areas (e.g., organizational culture, communications, human resources policies and practices, financial reporting);
- planning processes; determining mission and purpose; goal-setting;
- policy-making and development;
- roles and relationships with: council/city hall; community groups; the business community; friends groups/volunteers;
- role of the councillor on the board;
- dealing with the media;
- funding; fundraising; auditing finances;
- monitoring and evaluating the library's performance and key success factors;
- enhancing public standing for the board;
- trustee recruitment, selection, retention.

In other words, every board member should be knowledgeable about current board practice and alternatives, and comfortable in participating fully in:

- board governance/structures;
- policy and planning: strategic planning; annual goals and objectives;
- roles and relationships: CEO; municipality; community groups;
- director performance;
- finance (including the ability to read financial statements) and fundraising;
- monitoring/auditing;
- board assessment/profile and renewal.

The chair is also responsible for ensuring that there is a succession plan for his or her position by providing leadership opportunities for committee chairs and the vice-chair.

It is all too easy to glaze over a list like this but this is the foundation of effective trusteeship: knowing what to do and having the skills and tools to do the job well.

Each topic warrants discussion at the board table or in a workshop or retreat. And, of course, with each new appointment to the board, it is a new and different board. There should be a policy and procedures manual written for board development. Further, funds should be directed to training and supporting individual trustees and the board as a whole.

The board should discuss its priorities for training, with respect for individual differences (e.g., an accountant on the board, might easily scoff at the need for training in reading financial statements, a high priority training need for most trustees, but then that trustee might be enlisted in providing the training).

Then, what is a short-term need (near the beginning of one's term) and a medium- or longer-term need?

Then, who should be responsible (and accountable) for providing the training? the municipality? (the city clerk in rules of procedure; the director of finance for financial reporting and reading balance sheets.), the chair? (in board procedure, roles and responsibilities, structure), the CEO? (background reports, trend data, staff and facilities, newer developments).

**Trustees suggested that their library director should provide an orientation to their library/system, including, as a minimum:**

- An introduction to senior staff and tour of the facilities;
- A manual of current policies and procedures, including by-laws;
- A copy of the *Library Act* for British Columbia;
- Copies of the previous five years' annual reports;
- An overview of services considered "core" by previous boards and any innovative programs and services;
- An outline of indicators of library success with trend data for five years;
- A discussion of current trends and issues in public library provision and service delivery; and
- Data for changing demographics and service needs in your community.

**They suggested that again, as a minimum, the chair should provide an orientation to:**

- Funding;
- Maintaining legal, ethical and financial integrity;
- The role of the CEO and the board;
- Board authority and power;
- Effective meetings;
- Goal-setting.

**One area requiring clarification is the role of the councillor on the board.**

Some trustees believe that the councillor is on the board to act as the board's advocate in council chambers; some mayors and elected officials believe that the councillor is on the board to monitor and report; some councillors believe that they are on the board solely as a liaison. The legislation suggests that the councillor is on the board solely because one trustee needs to have this background. That is, one councillor must be appointed to the board of a municipal library but from the time of appointment his/her role as a councillor is moot; he/she is simply a member of the board. Much confusion ensues. Much discussion is necessary.

As with so much else that a board undertakes, a plan, with stated policies and written procedures, will more likely lead to change and accountability. Many boards assign responsibility for board development to their Governance Committee.

# Effective Meetings

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This section is excerpted from *The Effective Board Member* with elaboration for the chair.

A meeting is a purposeful formal gathering of organizational members to determine and undertake tasks to advance an agenda, maintain functions and processes and build the group's capacity to act in the future. Meetings are concerned with people and processes to develop and advance the organization's goals.

In other words, the meeting moves the organization forward. It does not simply hear about what happened last month unless this information will be used to inform planning and assessment at the meeting. A meeting of committee and staff reports on what was accomplished last month helps to provide air time for those who need it for reasons of ego but rarely moves the organizational agenda forward.

## Some Reasons for Meetings

- Dispense information (cannot be the only reason!); recognize that there are easier and more effective ways to do this;
- Solve problems, especially when the right problem has been identified; don't create solutions in search of a problem;
- Plan/strategize tasks; this helps to focus on setting strategic directions and objectives for the system on behalf of the community;
- Air concerns; concerns about individuals should be addressed to the chair or to the director, recognizing that only the chair speaks for the board; concerns should be placed on the agenda, not simply raised at a meeting without advance notice;
- Invest in board growth and learning; the chair plays the lead role in creating time for learning and providing opportunities for learning;
- Motivate staff, particularly through establishing directions and objectives and asking critical questions about assessment and impact;
- Make/validate decisions, the primary reason for meeting;
- Create new options, visions, directions, especially as part of a plan of continual renewal;
- Establish new governance procedures, such as revising the committee structure, establishing policies and procedures;
- Evaluate works in progress, through designing evaluation criteria or receiving and discussing evaluation reports from staff;
- Celebrate successes, too often overlooked.

Meetings occur in the context of the board's mission, vision, values and strategic plan. These should drive the agenda and the board's work, and must be known by everyone around the table and revisited at least annually.

**Does the board have commonly agreed upon norms or ground rules?**

Examples might include:

- arrive on time;
- be informed;
- come prepared;
- participate;
- ask questions;
- give opinions;
- never make personal comments about someone;
- be respectful, trusting, caring;
- keep board business in front of the board and personal business outside;
- focus on ideas and issues, not people,
- be honest;
- communicate authentically;
- comment succinctly and on topic;
- allow others to finish speaking;
- seek first to understand;
- assist the chair whenever possible;
- volunteer for follow-up tasks;
- the chair will summarize what has been accomplished;
- finish on time.

These are merely illustrative.

*Ground rules belong  
to the group and need to be  
articulated, written and reviewed  
at least annually.*

## ***Meeting Goals***

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What do we want to accomplish? Put it in writing.

Is this meeting necessary? Explore alternatives to face-to-face meetings, such as:

- committee meetings: governance; planning and policy; audit; consider discussing at the board table only what has been discussed first at a committee meeting with a recommendation coming forward;
- copies of minutes, letters, reports: posted on a board-only section of the website; use the library website—you will find more options and opportunities for information and dialogue than you thought possible;
- weekly bulletins or newsletters: prepared for the board by the director, and distributed electronically;
- brown bag lunches, suppers for informal workshops: these could be with or without staff; as a board or for interested trustees;
- electronic communication: teleconferences; email; round robin memos; wikis; blogs (if you are unfamiliar with these, have your staff give you a workshop prior to the next meeting);
- telephone calls; informal conversations; (a)synchronous chat, voice mail for board members (again, if you are unfamiliar with these, have your staff give you a workshop prior to the next meeting; you should know about them regardless);
- executive summaries, of reports, of conferences attended, of issue papers, of municipal issues.

## ***Considerations***

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### **The Role of the Chair**

Typically, chairs believe that meetings are better run than do trustees and directors.

The chair leads the board through regular meetings to achieve goals and objectives.

The chair is responsible for the agenda, in consultation with the director and board members.

The chair determines what will be placed on the consent agenda due to his or her knowledge of the board and of the material.

The chair is responsible for ensuring that the meeting starts and finishes on time.

The chair ensures that all issues are aired and discussed respectfully.

The chair ensures that the agenda is the focus for discussion.

The chair reviews the draft of meeting minutes prior to any posting.

## **The Agenda**

Consider having a director's workshop in advance of the meeting for training, for background information without decision-making, for exploration.

Committee reports should be in a standard format; one sheet (two pages) maximum; do not provide for oral reports (do not cater to lack of preparation if something can wait until the next meeting).

Consider colour coding material such a confidential reports.

Plan for a private/executive/in camera session at the beginning or end of the regular meeting so there is always a place for private matters relating to issues of land, labour or law.

Investigate and use a consent agenda. A consent agenda means that those items that are for information only, including minutes, are listed under the consent section at the beginning of the agenda. Also included are all non-controversial reports and even all non-controversial items for decision. The chair should know the board well enough to know which items will require discussion and which are non-controversial and can be approved in one motion.

List and number each item; include a staff name or board name and voice/email information for contact for clarifying information. Any board member who has questions requiring clarification can contact that person in advance rather than taking everyone's time during the meeting.

Approval of all items listed in the consent section is accomplished by one motion. There is no discussion on any item unless the item is removed from the consent agenda. Any board member can ask to have any item removed from the consent agenda; no reason needs to be given; no reason should be given; no discussion should be held. The item is simply removed and placed at a particular place on the agenda, usually at the end, when discussion will be held on that item. The chair then calls for approval of the consent agenda (meaning the remaining items) and all are approved in one motion.

Time is thus available for the big issues, the training needs, liaison with other groups. Time is not spent on information items, reports of last month's activities, unless there is substantive reason for discussion.

Articulate at the beginning of the meeting relevant ground rules and organization of the agenda; identify at the beginning of each item (or on the agenda) how much time is allocated and when questions will be taken (during or at the end of the item).

Keep to the topic being addressed on the agenda.

## **Dissemination of Agenda and Supporting Materials**

Distribute with all supporting materials (minutes; reports related to decisions required) in advance on the meeting, preferably one week in advance.

## **Announcement of the Meeting**

Include the date, time and location; post agendas (print and electronic); post minutes (print and electronic); enhance your public profile and accountability by ensuring that all information is available and easily accessible on your website.

Post information on the municipal website as well.

## **Minutes**

Include the decisions made and actions taken only, including who is responsible for action and by what date.

Maintain a pending list and a tracking list (to track disposition of decisions over time).

## **The Facility**

Plan the seating, ventilation, lighting, temperature, equipment; consider whether to have a board table, horseshoe or U-shape style.

Consider the seating of the chair, director and secretary.

Be sure that there is seating for observers and guests (provide both seating and materials, even if no one usually comes; this is a public meeting of a public body spending public funds).

***Training in effective meeting management may be helpful to you; and you should consider such training for the entire board as this is the most important time that you have together and studies tell us that your board members and your CEO typically think that the time is handled badly...***

## ***Sample Agenda***

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Introductory Remarks (state objectives and time)

Optional: information/announcements forum -10 minutes

### **Approval of the Agenda**

## ***Consent Agenda***

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Approval by consent; one motion

No discussion unless item is removed

All information items, including minutes

All non-controversial reports

All non-controversial decision items

List and number all items; include a staff name or board name and voice/email information to enable contact in the interest of providing clarification prior to the meeting

## ***For Discussion/Decision***

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### **Written documents only**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### **For Exploration**

At least one item on each agenda; use board members as facilitators

- 1.
- 2.

### **Items for Next Agenda**

- 1.
- 2.

### **Private Session**

Includes only matters relating to purchase/sales, personnel issues, negotiations, legal issues — consult municipal counsel for advice

**The mission statement should be on every page.**

# Responsibilities of the Board and the Director

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Many titles exist for the person in charge of the library.

As a not-for-profit board, the library board employs a chief executive officer (CEO) as its primary employee.

Many boards are reluctant to use this term but an agency needs a CEO and the director is that person. Some areas (e.g., Ontario) have legislated the term CEO to designate the library director.

In British Columbia, the *Library Act* uses the term Chief Librarian (similar to Chief Constable) but this is less common today. Some cities (e.g., Vancouver) use the term City Librarian (similar to University Librarian and makes it clear that this is more than a municipal department head).

More common is director, implying director of library services, similar to other city department heads who carry that term. The term used in this document for consistency is director.

Regardless of the term used for the role and job description, the board has but one employee. The director is the interface between the board and the staff, serving as secretary to the board and director of the staff. The director ensures that the library is operated according to the board's plan, policies and priorities. The relationship with the director must be a positive, creative partnership if the board is to fulfill its mandate.

When the board, or worse, individual trustees, become involved in the management of the library, they confuse roles and responsibilities and remove clear lines of authority and accountability. More successful boards grant appropriate authority and power to their director and provide support for carrying out their mandate. Their mandate is prescribed and proscribed by written strategic plans and directions, policies, and approved annual work plans.

*It is important to note that individual trustees have no authority except insofar as they form part of a board. Only the chair speaks for the board; only the chair gives direction to the director on behalf of the board.*

Effective boards recognize the creative and constructive partnership between the board and the library director. The board will never be successful without a successful and supported director. The director will never be successful if the board chooses to interfere in his or her sphere of influence. This is not to suggest that informal communication is not important between the director and individual trustees.

It is reasonable to expect that most boards will have policies on succession management and procedures in place to develop senior staff who can fill in for the director from time to time and are able to assume directorial responsibilities.

**Board:** Trustees are guardians of a “public trust” (hence, “trustees”) to ensure that the library provides relevant, comprehensive, and efficient service to the community it serves. The board represents the community and sets strategic directions and policies on its behalf, employs a chief executive officer to implement its plans and priorities, and monitors and evaluates that implementation. The board works closely with its one employee, the library director, through mutual trust and respect, recognizing mutual rights and responsibilities and professional expertise.

**Director:** The Chief Librarian (the term used in the *Library Act*) is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the library to fulfill the library’s mission and acts as an advisor to the board. The director is the link between policy and operations.

### ***Bottom Line...***

*How will the quality of life  
in our community have been  
improved as a result of our  
meeting here tonight?*

# Board Self-Assessment

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## A Tool for Improving Governance Practice

This tool is designed to be used as an annual board evaluation. It seeks to help a board answer the question: what are we as a board now doing well and what can we do better?

The instrument includes a section specifically addressed to the board chair. These criteria were developed for all not-for-profit boards. You may choose to modify or adjust the statements depending on your own specific situation or areas about which you would appreciate some feedback.

### Feedback to the Chair of the Board

disagree 1

disagree somewhat 2

not applicable 3

agree somewhat 4

agree strongly 5

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. The board has discussed the role and responsibilities of the chair.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. The chair is well prepared for board meetings.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. The chair helps the board to stick to the agenda.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. The chair ensures that every board member has an opportunity to be heard.                                   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. The chair is skilled at managing different points of view.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. The chair can be tough on us as a group when we get out-of-line.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. The chair knows how to be direct with an individual board member when his or her behaviour needs to change. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. The chair helps board members work well together.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. The chair demonstrates good listening skills.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. The board supports the chair.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. The chair is effective in delegating responsibility among board members.                                   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. The chair is the public face of the library in the community.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |

# Basic Considerations

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## Consider...

- Community development: how do we as a board connect agendas with the municipality and other agencies and lead, as a neutral, nonpartisan organization committed to the overall well-being of our community?
- Demonstrating value: the days of the public good being sufficient for entitlements and funding are past; how do we demonstrate value, even return on investment for the funds our shareholders (our taxpayers) have invested in us?
- Getting the right people around the table, doing the right things with critical respect: how do we recruit the skills and background we require for a highly effective and visible board that leaders want to join?
- Developing strong relationships with the CEO, with the municipality, with the community power bases: have we articulated who is responsible to whom for developing community relationships? Who works with the mayor? With council (other than at budget presentations)? With the business community? With the press?
- Using staff appropriately: what reports are reasonable to request? What role do trustees play with individual staff? Do we have one employee (the director) and one spokesperson for the board (the chair)?
- Developing a strong brand: what do you want to be known for in the community? What are you known for in the community? How do you know?
- Evidence-based decision-making: do we make decisions based on evidence or on assumptions of goodness? The strongest opinion? Or...?

### ***Bottom Line...***

*An effective library requires an  
effective board...*

*An effective board requires both an effective  
CEO and an effective chair...*

*You are accountable for making this  
happen...*



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