T³: Trustee Training Tips

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WHAT'S YOUR POLICY ON THAT?

Most trustees are familiar with library policies—at least they are aware that many exist and may even remember what a few of the more recent ones are. Many realize there are basically two kinds of library policy: personnel and operational. What many boards are missing are written *board* policies. These have nothing to do with how the library operates or how its staff is managed, but do explain how the library board functions. They are the rules and guidelines by which the board has determined it will operate. They are statements to staff, customers, and the public of board intent and belief.

A good set of board policies, with a copy for each trustee, helps new members learn their "jobs" as trustees and helps those who have been around a while have something a little more substantial than their memories to rely on. If you've ever sat in a board meeting waiting while the Secretary thumbs through old minutes looking for a specific decision, you'll understand the value of these.

You need writtten policies for several reasons:

- Trustees need to know what's expected of them
- The board needs guidelines to make consistent decisions
- Having policies in place prevents crisis policy-making
- The board can keep itself out of legal hot water by following its policies consistently.

A typical board policy manual should address your board's organization, responsibilities delegated to your director, the board meeting itself, library finances, employment, board officers and their duties, committees of the board, and facilities. Some of these are mandated by federal and state laws, but many are left to the discretion of the local board. Examples of local board policy might be who can sign checks on the library's account or who can speak to the media of behalf of the library or how complaints brought to the board are handled.

Each library board needs to write its own policy manual tailored to its needs, but assistance is available from your KDLA regional office. Samples of other libraries' board policies may help with format or serve as a "starter." And once completed, the policy manual needs to be updated each time the board adds to, deletes, or modifies a policy. Setting aside a time each year to review the entire set of policies is a very good idea as well.

ISSUES FOR BOARDS

One big surprise for most trustees upon starting their career as a board member is the number of laws and regulations they are expected to follow. Fortunately, the Trustee Manual highlights the most common and essential statutes and offers advice on how both a board and an individual trustee may lessen his/her liability.

- **Regular Board Meetings**

The library board is required to meet on a regularly scheduled basis once each month and must publish this information at the beginning of the calendar year in the local newspaper. The time of the meetings should be set so as to be convenient for the public to attend. If the date, time, or location changes, even slightly, from this published schedule, the meeting must follow the rules of a special called meeting.

- **Special Called Meetings**

Under the provisions for a special called meeting is the requirement that notice of the meeting shall be given to all local media (newspaper, radio, television) that have a *written* request for such notices on file with the library. Such notice, also written, must be given at least 24 hours prior to the time of the meeting. Libraries also need to post, where it may be seen by the public, the agenda for the special called meeting and shall not deviate from that agenda in any way.

- **Emergency Meetings**

The notice required for a special called meeting is not required in the event that a meeting is called to deal with an emergency involving injury or damage to personal property or financial loss to the library or there is a reasonable likelihood of such happening. Delaying a meeting simply to adhere to the 24 notice may actually increase the likelihood of injury, damage, or loss.

- **Visitors at Board Meetings**

No one may be required to identify himself or the organization he may represent in order to attend a library board meeting. However, if a member of the public wishes to address the board then she may be required to identify both herself and any organization she is representing.

- **Media at Board Meetings**

Members of the media may cover library board meetings and record and broadcast the meeting.

- **Closed Meetings**

There are a few exceptions to the *Open Meetings Act* that allow boards to go into a closed or executive session. Several of the reasons have no bearing on libraries, but three do. They are: (1) deliberations on the future acquisition or sale of real property, but only when publicity would be likely to affect the value of that property; (2) discussions of proposed or pending litigation against or on behalf of the library; and (3) discussions which might lead to the appointment, discipline, or dismissal of an individual employee without restricting that employee's right to a public hearing. If a library board has reason to go into a closed session, it needs to state in the minutes what that reason is, the time the closed session starts, and the time it ends. No action may be taken in such a session, but must be done in an open meeting and recorded in the minutes.

- **Changing Regular Meetings**

The library's bylaws will state the regular meeting day and time, but these can be changed to fit the convenience of the board. It may be worth changing to get a good board member that otherwise couldn't serve. Just be sure to follow your bylaws provisions for changing them.

PLAN, PLAN, PLAN

The most important thing in real estate may be location, location, location, but for public libraries it's planning. This often talked about, but less frequently done, activity strikes fear in the heart of many a librarian and trustee. Much as we dread it (no time, no staff, don't know how, my library's too small), planning remains the foundation upon which a library's services should be built. Many of the decisions that must be made about collection development, programming, public services, etc will be answered once there is a plan developed for the library that will chart its course for the next three or so years.

If your plan is to be one that truly is visionary, it's imperative that the process you use to develop your plan is a good one. Using a good facilitator to lead you through that process can be just as important. Such a person will help you develop a plan that thinks big, attacks the critical issues, and gets everyone involved in the plan. He or she will help you dream, keep you on task, bring new perspectives and objectivity to the task. Choose your facilitator carefully.

The process promoted for public libraries is the American Library Association's *Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process*. This method is a response to the continuing need for planning tools and techniques that are both feasible and evolving to meet the demands of rapid change. It replaces an older method, *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries*, used since 1987.

KDLA is offering two workshops on Planning for Results in the near future. First is a general information, how-to-do-it session to be held October 3rd in Bowling Green and October 5th in Frankfort. The second workshop addresses effective resource allocation and will be held on November 9th in Bowling Green and again on November 16th in Frankfort. Both workshops are free but do require advance registration. Details may be obtained from your regional librarian or by visiting KDLA's web page at <www.kdla.net>.

PUT YOUR JOHN HANCOCK HERE

Members of the library board are required to place their signatures on various documents from time to time. Whatever the occasion, whenever a signature is required it should be a real signature and never from a signature stamp. It helps, also, to get into the habit of signing in blue ink or at least some color other than black. The reason black is not acceptable on many documents requiring signatures is that it is difficult to determine whether or not it is a photocopy or the real thing.

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LIBRARY LETTERS

Dear Marian Librarian,

We've been told we need to have a Sexual Harassment policy, but all our employees are female so what's the big deal?

-- Troubled Trustee

Dear Troubled,

The big deal is that you *do* need such a policy regardless of the gender make-up of your staff. First of all, it's the law–section 703 of Title VII of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. And, sexual harassment claims can be same sex. Or, your employees may have legitimate claims against a customer of the library or a trustee. The policy you adopt should cover how complaints will be handled (a step-by-step guide) and should also include the provision for a person(s) through which to channel all complaints.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

The following quiz will let you test your knowledge on the topics covered in this publication. The answers can be found on KDLA's web page <**www.kdla.net**> under "Publications" in the left column.

1. How are board policies different from library policies?
2. Does the library need to provide notice to the media when it has a rescheduled meeting?
3. How does the board go about permanently changing its regular meeting schedule?
4. Why do we need a long-range plan?
5. Where can we get help doing a long-range plan?

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ANSWERS TO T^3 QUIZ:

1. **How are board policies different from library policies?**

   Board policies address how the library board will operate. They are the rules and guidelines for the trustees' actions as a board. The library policies speak to how the library operates (circulation or unattended children, for example) or how personnel are managed (breaks or sick leave).

2. **Does the library need to provide notice to the media when it has a rescheduled meeting?**

   Maybe, maybe not. First of all, a rescheduled meeting must follow the rules and regulations of a special called meeting even if it is the regular monthly meeting. If the media (newspaper, radio, etc) has filed a written request to be notified of special called meetings, then the answer is "yes." If no such written request has been made, then the answer is "no." Notice does need to be posted in the library however, along with the agenda. Only those items listed on the agenda may be discussed at such a meeting.

3. **How does the board go about permanently changing its regular meeting schedule?**

   Most library board's bylaws stipulate the procedure for such a change. Usually it involves at least two public readings of the proposed change before a final vote can be taken. The final answer lies in your library's bylaws.

4. **Why do we need long-range plans?**

   To build a foundation for the library's services based on a community vision. To provide guidance for board, management, and staff on the decisions regarding collection development, programming, public services, continuing education for staff, etc.

5. **Where can we get help doing a long-range plan?**

   Several sources are available to assist any library undertaking long-range planning. KDLA is offering two workshops this fall: general planning information in October and resource allocation based on planning in November. Both will be presented in Frankfort and in Bowling Green. Both are free but do require advance registration. Another source is your local regional librarian. And yet another source is a book on the new ALA method called Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process.