

INTRODUCTION

In order to serve North Carolina communities, our public libraries provide free and equal access to informational, educational, and recreational programs and materials in a variety of formats. The roles and responsibilities of a public library board of trustees include assistance with planning, advocacy, and community engagement to support the provision of high-quality public library service to the people of North Carolina.

This guide provides a broad view of public library trustee duties and responsibilities and can serve as a basis for discussion between trustees, Friends groups and library directors.

TYPES OF BOARDS

In North Carolina there are two types of public library boards of trustees – advisory and governing – and it’s important to know which type of board your library has.

An advisory board has no legal responsibilities except those delegated by the local government, and in most cases makes recommendations on policy to local government. Advisory boards serve their communities by informing the library’s long-range planning process, participating in library advocacy efforts, and advising local officials as to how public library service can meet community needs.

A governing board serves the community by being legally responsible for the control and management of the library. This type of board has the authority to make policy, set a budget, and hire the library director, as well as assisting in long range planning and advocacy efforts mentioned above.

DUTIES OF TRUSTEES

- Attend all board meetings and receive regular board training.
- Help secure adequate funding for the library.
- Understand the relationship between the library board and the library director.
- Become familiar with state and local library laws.
- Adopt bylaws and review them annually.
- Recruit to ensure Board diversity.
- Adopt or recommend library policies.
- Promote library services.
- Participate in long range planning to meet community needs.
- Receive regular Board training.
- Advocate for the library in the community, and advocate for the community as a member of the library board.

Local practices vary- Consult your library director and the bylaws of your board.

BOARD MEETINGS

Bylaws provide a roadmap to the board’s responsibilities and structure, including terms of office, the order of business, election of officers, quorum, attendance, voting, standing committees, and the board’s relationship to the library director.

Each board member should receive a packet of information, including the agenda, well in advance of a meeting to allow time for consideration of the issues to be discussed. Each member should have a copy

of all policies in effect, and all issues should be considered in conjunction with existing policies. A record of official actions and minutes of meetings must be kept on file at the library.

Board meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Law and should be held on the schedule specified in the bylaws and publicized in advance. Special meetings called to deal with particular issues are also considered open meetings.

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

It is the right of every citizen to have access to information and to decide what information he or she wants. The role of a public library in a democratic society is to ensure free and open access to information and materials as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.

Every public library should have in place a written collection development policy. This policy should include selection criteria for all types of library materials and a procedure for reconsideration of materials in the event of a challenge.

If a library faces a challenge to materials, the board of trustees should review the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read Statement, as well as its own policies.

Assistance is available from the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom, and the State Library of North Carolina.

It is the duty of the Board of Trustees to protect and defend Intellectual Freedom.

THE TRUSTEE IN THE COMMUNITY

Public library trustees play an important role in community engagement. Service on a public library board is service to the community. In order to be effective, it's important to:

- Understand and articulate the library's role in serving community needs.
- Plan carefully for library programs to align with services needed.
- Seek community reaction to library services.
- Engage in open, honest and friendly communication with local government officials.
- Maintain a positive relationship with the Friends of the Library.
- Develop strong relationships with community leaders.

GOLDEN RULES

- Leave management of the library to the library director. It is the director's responsibility to select books, employ the staff, and supervise day-to-day operations of the library.
- Do not criticize or voice your opposition publicly to a decision made by a majority vote of the library board.
- Respect confidential information. Do not divulge information regarding future board actions or plans until such action is officially taken.
- Observe policies of the board and library. Do not give information individually but refer questions about policies to the director or appropriate library representative.
- Do not use your position for personal gain, such as suggesting the library hire a relative.
- Never hold board meetings without the director.

- Let the library director handle complaints from the public. Continued dissatisfaction and problems should be taken up at the board meeting only if policy revision is necessary or legal ramifications are involved.
- Assume your full responsibility as a board member. If you are unable to attend meetings regularly, and complete work delegated to you, resign so that an active member can be appointed.

RESOURCES FOR TRUSTEES

The [State Library of North Carolina](#) can:

- Provide consulting services to trustees and directors on library issues.
- Provide training and continuing education opportunities for trustees.
- Develop and extend public library services for North Carolinians in partnership with local communities.
- Coordinate and support statewide library network activities to assure equality of access to electronic information resources for all North Carolinians.
- Provide library and information resources for North Carolinians to promote knowledge, lifelong learning, and economic development.

Other resources:

- ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom
<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif/>
- ALA Office of Public Policy and Advocacy
<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/wo>
- ALA United for Libraries: Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations
<http://www.ala.org/united/>
- Public Library Association
<http://www.ala.org/pla/>
- BoardSource
<https://boardsource.org/>
- North Carolina Public Library Standards
<https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/services-libraries/resources-library-staff/public-library-standards>
- Webjunction (learning center for public library staff, trustees, and Friends)
<https://www.webjunction.org/>

