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# Role of the Library Board



**Camrose Public**  
**LIBRARY**

Prepared for:

Camrose Public Library Board

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## **The Role of the Library Board**

A Library Board is a formal, policy-setting group that exists to set goals and objectives that will meet the community's information needs. Once Board members have considered the legislative and legal responsibilities of serving on the Library Board, what will they do? Stated quite simply, they will govern.

### **What is governance?**

Governance is "the overall processes and structures used to conduct an organization's operations and activities." The term implies ultimate responsibility and accountability. In other words, the Board is the decision-making and legal authority of the organization.

### **What is accountability?**

Going hand-in-hand with governance is the issue of accountability. Accountability means having to explain and accept responsibility for actually carrying out what the library is there to do. Because the library belongs to the public, the Board must be able to provide detailed information about how responsibilities have been carried out and what results have been achieved.

Today's more stringent expectations for the accountability of public bodies call for a focus on outcomes rather than a simple report on efforts and activities. The Board is accountable for the whole range of activity of the organization and for the results it achieves, but is not responsible for carrying out everything that is done. The activity of running the organization on a day-to-day basis is a responsibility delegated to the staff.

## **Ongoing Responsibilities of the Board**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century library is not the reading room of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It does require rocket science to fulfil its potential. What an exciting challenge for Boards!

As a corporation, the Board requires a "constitution and by-laws" to establish its functional framework. These two items provide the body of fundamental principles that govern how the Board operates (constitution) and the specific regulations and procedures (by-laws) to operate the Board. These are "mechanical aspects" of governance and include the name of the Board and purpose of the organization, its seal and symbol and rules for Board composition, officers of the Board, meetings, elections, committees, finances, rules of

order, staff, amendments and authority. Much of this information comes directly from the Alberta Libraries Act Chapter L-11.

### **Responsibility: To define the library's purpose and direction**

The Board is responsible for determining the purpose of the library and ensuring that it achieves what it is meant to achieve. It must define new directions in response to changing environmental conditions and broadly draft a course of action to be undertaken by staff to meet the needs of the community.

### **Responsibility: To delegate authority and resources to the staff to run the library**

The Board must ensure that the best possible staff is in place and let the staff do the job. This requires the Board to put in place a CEO who is capable of managing the entire operation as well as a comprehensive framework for operations. The Board DOES NOT have direct responsibility for operations and programming. The Board must, however, ensure that the financial resources are available to provide library service to the community.

### **Responsibility: To act as a bridge between the library and the Municipal Council and the library and the community**

The Board represents the public in its stewardship of the library. The Board works with the staff to determine what the public wants and, in turn, to let the public know what the possibilities of library service are. To do this, the Board must maintain regular contact with the public – with both those who use the library and those who do not. The Board collects data that will guide the Board in setting future directions for the library. In order to achieve future goals, the Board must communicate this information to the Municipal Council and advocate for the necessary resources. It is essential that the Board maintain a close working relationship with the Municipal Council – the library's major funder and partner.

### **Responsibility: To report on the library's effectiveness**

The Board must be constantly aware of its requirement to report on the effectiveness of organizational achievement. It must carefully monitor policies and controls and elicit appropriate information to be able to report to Council, the community and the province in a meaningful way. The Board reports on the library's effectiveness in a variety of ways. Examples include the annual report to Municipal Council and to the community showing the library's achievement of its annual goals and objectives and the annual audit demonstrating the library's ability to manage financial resources.

## **Responsibility: To practice good governance**

The Board is responsible for its own operations - those of the Board itself. Included in this are the organization and structure of the Board, how it conducts meetings, its committees and the role of its officers.

## **The Skills that Trustees Need**

The responsibilities outlined in the previous section are not simple tasks. They require a number of specialized skill sets in four major activities.

### **Policy development**

Policy development is a key job for the Board of directors. Its critical nature comes from the organization's need for continuity. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the Board exists beyond the tenure of individual Board members and, as such, must provide for the continuing existence of the organization. Because a full complement of policies provides the necessary framework for all of the operations and priorities of the library, it is the chief tool to maintain the library's continuity. A policy framework allows for a smooth transition from old to new Boards. New board members can step into their jobs without having to start from scratch and the library has a consistent base for ongoing activities.

To be a useful tool, policy must be in writing and approved at a duly called Board meeting. Using the input and expertise of the staff, the Board works through a series of stages to debate opinions on various issues and consolidates the collective values and beliefs of the Board, staff and community into the basis of a policy statement. From there, the Board identifies the rules and parameters for action and finally outlines specific procedures that will guide all future action.

The skills necessary for writing policy include the willingness to listen to all sides of an issue and the courage to state beliefs and stand by decisions that are made. The Board must also, however, commit to monitoring and reviewing policy regularly and to making the revisions necessary to adapt to changing environments.

### **Planning**

The Board's focus must be firmly on the future, rather than on the day-to-day activities of the library. Determining the direction of the organization and deciding how quickly it will take to get there are chief planning functions for the Board. In conjunction with the senior management and armed with the expertise of the staff and the input of the community which the Board represents,

the Board develops the mission, goals and objectives that will guide the library's activities into the future. Community input may be gathered in a variety of ways including needs assessment, focus groups, public meetings, etc.

The planning task requires that trustees develop a big-picture approach to their tasks. The Board must also be willing to ensure that the necessary resources are available for the library to be able to achieve its planned results. Whether this means additional funding, a new building or increased professional staff, the Board must plan not only where to go, but also how to get there.

Strategic planning is a technique used by Boards and senior management to focus the library's energy towards achieving its mission and goals over a period of three to five years. It is strategic because it requires the planning team to analyze the changing environment and consider how best to respond to it.

The importance of strategic planning cannot be over-emphasized. Boards often find it difficult to make time for such a future-oriented approach because of the rapid advances libraries are facing, especially with respect to technology. It is critical for the Board to identify a clear vision for library service, based on input from all stakeholders, that will fit within the community's master plan, and then to set priorities and monitor the library's achievements over time.

The skills required to plan include the abilities to think in broad, future-oriented terms, to seek and listen to input from all stakeholders, especially those whose interests are being represented, and to translate that input into a comprehensive plan. Also required is a degree of comfort with taking calculated risks to make things happen.

## Advocacy

As the body that is ultimately accountable for the operation of the library, the Board must be able

### How good is your library?

You need to know if your advocacy is to succeed. Make sure the things that matter are measured. Do not be misled by statistics. They have their purpose but they are only one indicator.

to speak for the library to the public and to Councils. Chief among the advocacy responsibilities, the board must shoulder are securing adequate funding for the library to provide its services, ensuring that there is an adequate physical facility for the library service and acquainting the community with the library and its services. Each year, the Board will present the proposed budget to the Municipal Councils and lobby for the necessary funds. Similarly, in cases where facilities are inadequate, the Board will lobby and, if necessary, undertake to raise further funds to improve library facilities. Finally, the Board will report on the

effectiveness of the library in meeting goals and objectives, both to the Councils and to the community of owners.

For many years funding and resource development have been the subjects of much discussion in the library community. The rapid advances in computer technology along with increased competition for municipal dollars have strained the resources of many Boards. As a result, they have had to consider raising funds or entering into a variety of activities to increase revenue and thus meet the needs of the community. The discussion, while sometimes controversial, continues. Many Boards have found that community members are happy to support the library and are enjoying considerable success raising funds. There has also been a gradual increase in the number of fundraising professionals joining the staff of public libraries in Alberta. Fundraising remains a very debated form of advocacy.

## Partnerships

To collaborate means to work in partnership. Synonyms for collaboration include "co-operation," teamwork and synergy. It is the synergistic nature of collaboration that makes it most appealing, the notion that working in conjunction with other people, teams or bodies can result in something more than simply the sum of the parts.

While collaborative projects can indeed be exciting, they are almost always extremely challenging. They require significant attention to process as well as to product. The ability to collaborate depends on strong communication skills, regular contact, trust, a willingness to accept another's point of view, flexibility, adaptability, and the capacity to resolve conflict constructively and build consensus whenever possible.

Partnerships are becoming a common means for Library Boards to achieve outcomes they could otherwise not manage on their own. It is simply not possible for the library to exist in isolation, especially when so many other organizations are also involved in providing information. Many innovative projects have arisen when libraries and community groups pool their talents and resources. Initiatives such as shared facilities between schools and public libraries or municipal service access points housed in public libraries are just two examples of the varied and exciting partnerships emerging in the libraries. Developing and nurturing such partnerships is the mark of a dynamic and forward-thinking Board.

## Required and Recommended Policies

	Required	Recommended
By-laws	*	
Confidentiality of user records	*	
Orientation and continuing education of board and staff	*	
Finance Policy	*	
Personnel Policy	*	
Statement on Intellectual Freedom		*
Selection, acquisition and disposition of materials	*	
Request for Reconsideration Policy		*
Expression of concern/request for reconsideration of library resources form		*
Provision for library resources to be lent (Resource Sharing)	*	
Waiving of fines/fees on library materials		*
Provision for persons unable to use conventional print or languages other than English	*	
Records retention policy and schedule (required under FOIP)	*	
Personal Information Banks (required under FOIP)	*	
Internet access and acceptable use		*
Hours of Service	*	
Terms and conditions for use of public meeting space	*	
Workplace violence, harassment and other unacceptable behaviour	*	
Working alone	*	
Job descriptions for Library Trustees (included in Board Governance Policy)		*
Board Governance		



## **Duties and Responsibilities of the Board and its Members**

### *From Camrose Public Library Board Governance Policy*

The Board shall meet and deliberate at specific, regular times as determined by its members and in accordance with the Alberta Libraries Act. At minimum, the Board will meet four times per year, with a quorum of the Board consisting of those members present and voting.

The job of the Board is to achieve the library's Vision, Mission, Beliefs, Goals, and Objectives and to be an advocate for the Camrose Public Library. The Board also forms the foundation for policy development which defines the governance process, the director's parameters, the Board Director relationship and the long range benefits. It is the Board's role to create procedures providing for the orientation and ongoing development of trustees as they fulfill their fiduciary duties.

The Board must comply with legislation to develop an approved three to five year plan of service, a budget, an annual report, and audited financial statements. Existing policies should be reviewed or revised on a three year cycle and to new policies should be formulated when necessary. The Board defines payments and reimbursement of expenses for meetings, approved conferences, and workshops (see Finance Policy) and recognizes the contributions of long serving staff, volunteers and trustees. Each year the Board elects a chairperson during the organizational meeting.

### **Role of Board Chair**

The role of the Chair is primarily to ensure the integrity of the Board's process and secondarily, to represent the Board to outside parties.

The Chair upholds the Board's own policies and rules as well as those legitimately imposed from those outside the organization. The Chair also chairs Board meetings with all the commonly accepted powers including ruling and recognizing, but has no authority to make decisions beyond powers created by the board. The Chair must be consistent with the Board's positions, policies (Governance Process and Board-Director Relationship policies), and resolutions when making decisions on behalf of the Board or when representing the Board to outside parties. It is the responsibility of the Chair to communicate with any member of the staff, Board or public when there are complaints or grievances regarding the Director. The Board, not the Chair, has authority to supervise/direct the Director. The Chair must also restrict meeting agendas and discussion and keep deliberations timely, fair, orderly, and thorough. The Chair acts as a voting ex-officio member of all committees. In the Chair's absence, the Vice-Chair will be responsible for fulfilling the Chair's duties.

## **Role of the Vice-Chair**

In the Chair's absence, the Vice-Chair will be responsible for fulfilling the Chair's duties. The Vice-Chair is also responsible for:

- Annual trustee orientation
- Annual board evaluation
- Typically acts as ex-officio of the Finance Committee
- Undertakes any other duties assigned by the Chair

## **Role of the Recorder**

The role of the Recorder is to record the minutes of all board meetings.

## **Finance Committee**

The role of the Finance Committee is to supervise the financial affairs of the Library and keep the Board informed on the financial matters. The Finance Committee reviews the financial statements of the organization and compares it to the budget, making any necessary recommendations to the Board. Reviewing capital expenditure and establishing financial controls are both the responsibility of the Finance Committee.

## **Personnel Committee**

The role of the Personnel Committee is to work with the Board on making recommendations for recruitment, compensation, performance evaluation, or any other human resources matters.

## **Policy Committee**

The role of the Policy Committee is to create, develop, discuss, and review policy that guides the functioning of the Library.

## **Code of Conduct**

The Board and its members shall operate in an ethical and professional manner, representing the Board in a positive light and taking no private action that will compromise the Board and its decisions.

Board trustees shall work in an ethical manner, avoiding personal or financial benefits at the expense of other library users. The trustees should attempt to work harmoniously with the Board, respecting the structure and views of the institution and Board members to work in the best interests of the institution. Confidentiality of library records is crucial and trustees must limit their trusteeship role to policy governance and advocacy.

Trustees are also expected to take responsibility for their personal development through continuing education opportunities and participation in provincial and national library organizations. Trustees should support intellectual freedom in the selection of library material. When a trustee is delegated by the Board to attend a specific function, those expenses reimbursed by any other group may not be claimed from the Camrose Public Library.

## **Annual Agenda**

To accomplish its job outputs consistent with Board policies, the Board will follow an annual agenda. The agenda will focus Board attention on governance priorities using a systematic approach.

Annually, the Board will engage in the following activities which include the following:

- approval of budget,
- Board orientation and education,
- Director's evaluation,
- election of officers and Executive Committee,
- ensure the submission of the annual grant application,
- organizational meeting,
- policy evaluation, review & revision,
- review and approve of audited statements, PRL's Annual Report and the Annual Reports for PRL's Library Service Points, review: the Plan of Service, Board - Director Relationship, book allotment, Director's Parameters, Finance Schedules, governance process, investments, Vision, Mission, Beliefs, Goals, and Objectives.

## **Board-Director Relationship**

All authority delegated from the Board to staff is delegated through the Director so all authority and accountability of staff, as far as the Board is concerned, is considered to be the authority and accountability of the Director. The Board will establish governance policies and will delegate the implementation and subsidiary procedure development to the Director.

The Board will:

- Direct the Director to achieve defined results, through Vision, Mission, Beliefs, Goals, and Objectives policies as established.
- Limit the latitude of the Director in practices, methods, conduct and other means to achieve the Vision, Mission, Beliefs, Goals, and Objectives only through establishment of policies.
- Authorize the Director to establish all further procedures, recommend new policy to the Board, make all decisions, and take all actions as long as they represent a reasonable interpretation of the Board policies.
- Monitor the Director's performance and it will be considered synonymous with organizational performance as a whole. Consequently, the Director's job contributions can be stated as performance in only two areas:
  - accomplishment of the Board policies on Vision, Mission, Beliefs, Goals, and Objectives,
  - compliance with the Board policies.
- Monitor organizational compliance with a given Board policy in one or more of three ways:
  - *Internal report*: Disclosure of compliance information to the Board from the Director.
  - *External report*: Discovery of compliance information by a disinterested, external auditor, specialist, or consultant who is selected by and reports directly to the Board. Reports must assess executive performance only against policies of the Board, not those of the external party unless the Board has previously indicated that party's opinion to be the standard.
  - *Direct Inspection*: Discovery of compliance by a Board trustee, a committee, or the Board through inspection of documents, activities or circumstances as directed by the Board which allows a "prudent person" test of policy compliance.

## Board Evaluation

1. Is the Board functioning effectively as a group?
2. Has the Library Board acted effectively to cope with problems, handle challenges and take advantage of opportunities?
3. Is the Board fulfilling its responsibility for governance without taking on operations responsibilities?
4. Has the Library Board been successful in gaining effective financial support for the library?
5. Are the Trustees aware of current issues facing public libraries?
6. Is each member of the board engaged and interested in the Board's work?
7. Has the board made policy decisions that effectively guide the operational activities of staff?

## Resources

Alberta Library Trustees' Association (ALTA)	<a href="http://www.librarytrustees.ab.ca/">http://www.librarytrustees.ab.ca/</a>
Alberta Public Libraries electronic Network (APLEN)	<a href="http://www.thealbertalibrary.ab.ca/aplen.html">http://www.thealbertalibrary.ab.ca/aplen.html</a>
Library Association of Alberta (LAA)	<a href="http://www.laa.ca/">http://www.laa.ca/</a>
Public Library Services Branch (PLSB)	<a href="http://www.albertalibraries.ca/">http://www.albertalibraries.ca/</a>
The Alberta Library (TAL)	<a href="http://www.thealbertalibrary.ab.ca/">http://www.thealbertalibrary.ab.ca/</a>
The Canadian Library Trustees Network	<a href="http://clatrusteenetwork.wordpress.com/">http://clatrusteenetwork.wordpress.com/</a>
Camrose Public Library Plan of Service 2014 - 2019	<a href="http://issuu.com/camrose/docs/pos_2014_2019">http://issuu.com/camrose/docs/pos_2014_2019</a>

## Alberta's Regional Library Systems



**Area 1** – Peace Library System

**Area 2** – Yellowhead Regional Library System

**Area 3** – Parkland Regional Library System

**Area 4** – Marigold Library System

**Area 5** – Chinook Arch Regional Library System

**Area 6** – Shortgrass library System

**Area 8** – Northern Lights Library System