

# Trustee Handbook

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MONTANA PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARDS



2025

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## State Librarian's Letter



Dear Library Trustee: Thank you for serving on the Board of your public library. Along with your library staff and your community, we at the State Library appreciate your commitment to help us better serve all Montanans by meeting their information needs. As a trustee, your role is to ensure that your library meets the information needs of your community. Today, as libraries take on many different responsibilities to best serve their patrons, the role of library trustees is changing and is more challenging and rewarding than ever.

While readers of all ages still relish the hours spent with a good book, there's no doubt that technology has revolutionized how people access and use information. Books now come in print, audio, and electronic form. Patrons are much more likely to do their research online rather than using reference books. Preschoolers enhance their early literacy skills via educational computer games, and seniors are one of the fastest growing populations of new users of the Internet and social media.

Serving communities also means that libraries serve as community centers. From programming for all ages to art space, computer classes, and meeting rooms, libraries bring people together from all walks of life and all parts of our communities. But even as the demand for library services continues to grow, costs rise and the resources that traditionally support libraries are more limited than ever. So, yes, being a trustee is challenging, but it is a challenge that your community believes you can - and will - meet.

This handbook can help. If you are new to the position, this handbook can serve as your starting point to learn about your new responsibilities. If you have served as a trustee for some time, it is a source book for refreshing your knowledge and honing your skills.

We hope you will make full use of your trustee handbook as well as the rest of the support we provide. By working together, we can continue to improve library services for all Montanans.

Again, thank you for your time and your commitment to your public library.

Sincerely,

Jennie Stapp

Montana State Librarian

# How to get the most out of this document

## Purpose:

This handbook is primarily for individuals who have recently joined the library board. Experienced board members may find the content useful for reviewing the job of the board. State Library staff have developed supplemental resources that can be used when actively working on an issue facing the library. This handbook is designed to give board members a sense of the complexity and depth of the job.

## How to Use this Document:

- Read the first chapter about the job of the board to learn about the overall responsibilities of library boards and library board members.
- Skim through the rest of the handbook to develop a deeper understanding about various components of the job of the library board.
- Complete a more thorough review of the sections that pertain to items the board is working on right now.

## Where to learn more?

- More in-depth information including handbooks and videos can be found on the [Trustee page](#) of the Montana State Library's website.

This handbook was prepared as an educational resource and should not be used as a substitute for legal advice. The publication was funded in part with federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant funds. These funds are administered through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Montana State Library Commission.

# Responsibilities of Trustees and the Board

## Overview

The library board governs the library. This work includes planning, budgeting, monitoring finances, personnel management, advocating for the library, and policy development. Governing means listening to community members, the director, and others when making decisions that impact library services. The director manages the day-to-day operations of the library.

It might be helpful to think of the library board as being similar to a city council. The board is the legislative body for the library. This means the board makes decisions. The director and staff carry out the work of those decisions.

While boards are comprised of individuals, authority and power rests with the board. An individual board member contributes to the work, listens to others, shares their insight and knowledge, but decisions must come from the board. Teamwork is important.

Get to know the other people who serve on the Board not just their names but who they are. What are their interests and concerns? What motivates them to serve on the library Board? Team building begins by knowing your teammates.

Get to know the director. There must be a very high level of trust between the Board who governs the library and the person who manages the library.

Although you are a volunteer, the governance of the library will require your time and your effort.

## Strategies for a successful start

### Trustee Orientation

Orientations are normally conducted by the director and the board chair or designee. Typically, Board orientation includes a tour of the library, receipt of written materials and a meeting with other trustees. During this orientation period it is a good idea to have experienced trustees work with new members. It's helpful to have an experienced member answer questions a new member may have about an upcoming decision of the board.

Want to learn more? Visit [New Library Board Member Orientation](#) for a template

## Continuing Education

Effective library trusteeship requires ongoing learning and training. There are many opportunities for you and your Board to keep learning, including the following recommendations (some may require creating a free account; others require membership to access some resources).

- Montana State Library's [MSL Learn site](#)
- [Montana Library Association](#)
- [Mountain Plains Library Association](#)
- [Pacific Northwest Library Association](#)
- [WebJunction](#)

Visit the [Board of Trustees Continuing Education webpage](#) for more resources.

### Essential

- [The Public Library Standards](#) require library boards to receive at least 3 hours of continuing education each year.
- Rotate meeting locations at branches of a system, if applicable.

### Where to learn more about libraries

- Attend State Library sponsored events.
- Attend Federation meetings.
- Work through a section of the trustee handbook or [watch one of MSL's short videos](#) during meetings or set aside time at each meeting to review an aspect of the library's administration or services.
- Attend MLA's annual conference and other events.

### Other Opportunities

Participate in professional organizations: Montana Library Association (MLA), Mountain Plains Library Association (MPLA), the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA), or the Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) offer opportunities to network with others and learn more about library administration and services.

### Montana State Library Event Calendar

This [online statewide training/event calendar](#) provides a focused source of information for library related activities that trustees and libraries can use as a planning tool.

## Optional Trustee Certification

Trustees are welcome to certify through the Montana State Library's certification program for trustees. This optional track gives individual trustees a choice in how they will engage in continuing education on the role of trustees and their specific responsibilities.

Certificates are valid for 4 years.

Total Credits: 15 continuing education credits earned in a 4-year period

- Library Administration Category: 10 credits
- Electives: 5 credits in any category

### Verification

Once you have the required number of credits, you will need to submit your certification record. The board chair will be contacted to verify your certification record after the MSL Continuing Education Coordinator reviews the submission. The vice chair will verify the chair's record.

Want to learn more? [Visit the MSL Certification Program webpage](#).

# The Job of a Trustee

As a trustee, you are entrusted by the public to look after its interest. You are also accountable to the public. Trusteeship is a working relationship with the community, library staff and fellow trustees. It requires a great deal of time and a commitment to libraries. There is a correlation between the quality of library service a library offers and the knowledge, capability, and enthusiasm of its Board members.

## What Does a Trustee Do?

### A TRUSTEE KNOWS

- the organization of the library Board
- the library services and resources available
- how to work effectively in a group

### A TRUSTEE ATTENDS

- every Board and assigned committee meeting
- as needed, other meetings and workshops relating to library business

### A TRUSTEE SHARES

- their ideas for future priorities of the library
- their thoughts about potential changes to library policies and services
- information about library services with other community members and local government leaders
- their expertise and knowledge about issues facing the library

### A TRUSTEE SUPPORTS

- the library and the director
- the local governing body
- the community

### A TRUSTEE REMEMBERS

- the library Board acts only as a whole
- an individual trustee may act on behalf of the library only when authorized to do so by the Board
- the Board does not run the day-to-day operations of the library
- building positive relationships with each other, local government, the library director, and community leaders creates higher quality library service

## Golden Rules for Board Members

- Leave the actual management of the library to the director. It is the director's responsibility to select books, employ the staff, manage public complaints, and supervise day-to-day operations.
- After a policy or rule is adopted by the majority vote of the library Board, do not criticize or re-voice your opposition publicly.
- Respect confidential information.
- Observe any publicity and information policies of the Board and library. Do not give information individually but refer requests to the library director or appropriate trustee.
- Do not hold board meetings without the director.
- Treat the director and staff members in an objective manner.
- All rules and policies must be approved by a quorum of the Board at a regular meeting.

Assume your full responsibility as a Board member. If you are unable to attend meetings regularly and complete work delegated to you, consider resigning so an active member can be appointed.

## Ethical Considerations for Trustees

As a Board member of a public library, you are a public servant. The public expects that your conduct will always be above question and for the public good, not for your own interest or another special interest.

As mandated by the Constitution of Montana, Montana has a code of ethics that prohibits conflict between public duty and private interest for members of the legislature, state employees and local officers. Under the rules of conduct outlined in this law, trustees cannot disclose or use confidential information acquired in the course of their official duties for personal gain or economic benefit nor can they accept gifts of substantial value.

## Guidelines for Preserving Public Trust

- Encourage all trustees to attend, perform and take part in board activities.
- Abide by the time limits of the terms of office for trustees and advise the appointing authority when those terms are up.
- Keep all library board meetings open to the public as required by law and make sure advance notice of board meetings is given to the public.
- Formally adopt written rules and policies. Keep them up to date and publicize them.
- Vote for proposed actions only when there is sufficient information. If a trustee abstains, be sure the minutes show that.
- Be sure that accurate minutes of each meeting are maintained and that votes are properly recorded.

- Seek outside assistance on technical matters. Obtain the assistance of the city or county attorney or retain the services of a qualified attorney for legal matters.
- Publish minutes, reports and financial statements in local newspapers, library newsletters, or the library website to inform the public.
- Trustees should not profit from their appointment to the Board. Avoid conflicts of interest, such as a trustee acting as the board's attorney, investment advisor, banker, insurance consultant, accountant, or a purveyor of goods and services which the library buys.
- If there is a potential conflict of interest, disclose it in a public meeting.

## Trustee Job Description

Even though a library trustee is a volunteer position, becoming a trustee is like taking on a new job. It requires the same hard work and willingness to learn as does a paid position.

You might have been given a job description to review before becoming a trustee. If not, your board may want to consider preparing one. A written job description may help future potential trustees understand the roles and responsibilities of the position. Please see Appendix 1 for a sample job description.

# The Job of the Board

The Board does not manage the day-to-day operations of the library but, rather, is responsible for seeing that the library is well managed in accordance with the law and board-established policies. To meet this responsibility, the Board has six major tasks:

- Understand the laws governing the library
- Set and monitor the library's budget
- Set policy
- Plan for the future of the library
- Advocate for the library in the community and for the community as a Board member
- Hire and evaluate the library director and, with the director's input, hire and prescribe the duties of library staff

Each of these areas is addressed in later sections of this handbook.

## Board Meetings

The most important work of the Board is carried out at the Board meetings.

First, individual trustees have no legal authority over the library. Any change in policy or procedure, or other governing act, must be brought before the Board.

Second, the Board only has authority when it makes a group decision in a legally constituted meeting.

The Board bylaws provide the structure of your work, but here are some general guidelines for effective meetings.

- Deal only with appropriate issues and make a clear distinction between the functions of the Board and those of the director.
- Ensure that the director is present at all Board meetings.
- Rotate leadership responsibilities to create a stronger Board; each trustee should have the opportunity to hold office.
- Hold regularly scheduled meetings
- Use parliamentary procedure such as Robert's Rules of Order to conduct business and maintain an orderly flow for the meetings.
- Keep an archival file of Board minutes in the library or on the website. Individual Board members should retain current minutes in their trustee handbooks.
- Hold working Board sessions and committee meetings prior to the formal Board meetings where decisions are made. This saves time and provides an opportunity for careful study of an issue.
  - Remember: Committees issue recommendations to the Board but do not make the decisions.

Meetings must be open to the public and held in accessible locations.

## Public Participation

Montana law states that tax-supported libraries are subject to the Montana Open Meeting Law. The purpose of this law is to protect the public's right to know. The legal requirements for open meetings, however, should be seen as the minimum requirements. From an administrative and community relations point of view, the more open you can make your meetings, the better it will be for the library.

Public participation does not mean that the public takes over the meeting. The Board chairperson should welcome public comment at appropriate times, but the amount of time made available for this is either spelled out in a public participation policy or at the chairperson's discretion.

## Board Bylaws

The Board's bylaws provide the general structure for your work and ensure continuity and consistency in legal, financial, and policy-making activities. Bylaws should be periodically reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant.

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## Comparing the Roles of the Library Board and the Director

BOARD	DIRECTOR
Employ a competent and qualified director.	Employ personnel with the board's input and supervise their work.
Develop a long-range plan, vision and mission statements and review them periodically.	Provide input to the board on library trends or community needs that should be considered as part of a long-range plan.
Determine and adopt written policies governing operation and program of the library.  Review policies periodically.	Suggest needed policies for Board consideration.  Carry out the policies as adopted by the Board.
Evaluate and discuss the library's progress in achieving its plan.  Secure adequate funds to carry out the library's program.	Prepare regular reports with library's current progress and future needs.  Communicate financial needs of the library to the board. Assist with efforts to raise funds for the library.
Support efforts to raise awareness of the library and its services.	Maintain active public relations program.
Assist in preparation of the annual budget and approve it.	Prepare an annual budget in consultation with the Board.
Present the budget to the funding agency, public officials, and the public; explain and defend it.	Closely follow the budget process.  Assist the board with presenting the budget to the funding agency
Monitor budget expenditures during the fiscal year.	Oversee expenditures from budget including selection and ordering of all library materials and equipment.
Know local and state laws; actively support library legislation in the state and nation.	Know local and state laws; actively support library legislation in the state and nation.
Board governs.	Director manages.

Want to learn more? MSL staff have created a [series of short videos for trustees](#)

# Job of the board: Understand the laws governing the library

## Complying with the Law

Because public libraries are supported by public tax dollars, they are subject to numerous laws and regulations. As a trustee, you are responsible for being familiar with these laws and understanding their consequences. When dealing with legal issues the Board should consult with the city or county attorney for interpretation of the law.

Laws specific to governing public libraries in Montana are addressed on the [Montana State Library website](#). There are links to pertinent Montana Code Annotated, Administrative Rules, and Attorney General Opinions.

## Montana Laws

The Constitution of Montana [Article X, Education and Public Lands, 1(3)] directs the Legislature to "provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools" and "other such educational institutions, public libraries and educational programs as it deems desirable."

Laws specific to libraries are contained in the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). In addition, there are several Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) that concern library operation and funding mandates.

A selection of state laws and rules you should be familiar with as a library trustee include the following.

### Free Public Libraries (MCA 22-1-3)

The stated purpose of this law is "to encourage the establishment, adequate financing, and effective administration of free public libraries in this state to give the people of Montana the fullest opportunity to enrich and inform themselves through reading."

The following items are addressed in this MCA chapter:

- Creation of a legal public library
- Mill levies, special library funds and bonds
- Authorization, allocations and investment of a library depreciation reserve fund
- Trustee appointment, compensation, and term length
- Powers and duties of the Board
- Appointment of and compensation for the library director and staff
- Exclusion and extension of library use privileges
- Various laws covering city, county, and city-county libraries

Want to learn more? There are a variety of ways a public library can be created in Montana. For more information on all types of libraries see the Types of Libraries and Board Authority document in the [Appendix](#).

### Library Records Confidentiality Act (MCA 22-1-11)

This act mandates no person may release or disclose any portion of a library record that identifies a person as having requested, used, or borrowed library materials except in response to a written request from the person identified in that record, court order or National Security letter. The law applies to all library users. Confidentiality protection for library records is waived when materials are overdue or lost.

### Library Federations (MCA 22-1-4)

This group of laws discusses library federations which attempt to pool resources and avoid duplication of effort. Details include establishment of a federation, participants, benefits, governing board, resolution of disagreements, and administration of federation appropriations.

Want to learn more? Visit the [Library Federations](#) page for a map and information about these regional networks.

### Open Meetings (MCA 2-3-2)

The Open Meeting Law requires that meetings of public or governmental bodies-including boards, bureaus and commissions-must be open to the public. The Library Board of Trustees must develop procedures for permitting and encouraging the public to participate in agency decisions that are of significant interest to the public.

Learn more about the open meeting law by reviewing the handbook and videos available on the [Board Meeting Resources page](#).

### Code Of Ethics (MCA 2-2-1)

The code of ethics is designed to prohibit conflict between public duty and private interest by specifying rules of conduct for public officers, which includes library trustees. The rules cover confidential information, gifts and other economic benefits or compensations.

### Montana State Library Commission (MCA 22-1-1)

This law establishes the State Library Commission. The Commission is composed of the State Superintendent of the Office of Public Instruction, or a designee; five governor appointees, who serve staggered terms of three years each; and a librarian from the Montana university system, appointed by the Commissioner of Higher Education.

## Montana State Library (MCA 22-1-2)

The State Library Commission maintains and operates the Montana State Library, located in Helena. This law addresses the role of the library in providing library services and support to state government, the library federations, and local libraries.

## Public Library Standards (ARM 10.102.11)

These administrative rules detail standards for public libraries and the process libraries must follow to meet those standards. To receive state financial aid public libraries must meet the essential standards.

Want to learn more? Visit the [Public Library Standards](#) page to see the standards and learn about the elective road map.

## Board Liability (MCA 2-9-305)

The legal power of the library Board derives from the Board's actions as a body. Because these actions are subject to public scrutiny - and can be challenged in court - you and the other members of your Board need to be well informed and make decisions based on sound judgment.

There are several major areas in which Board liability may be incurred:

- Acts in excess of authority. For example, inappropriate expenditures or exceeding budget spending levels.
- Failure to act when action should have been taken. For example, failure to meet contractual obligations.
- Negligence. For example, unsafe buildings and grounds.
- Intentional misconduct. For example, libel, assault, improper discharging of an employee, theft, etc.
- Acts in violation of the law. For example, improper reimbursement to trustees and employees, authorizing payment of improper expenses, purchasing certain property without obtaining bids, failing to follow proper rules for hiring, acting on an issue when there is conflict of interest, etc.

The library board should check with their city or county attorney or their insurance carrier to confirm the board has liability insurance coverage. In most cases there is no personal liability for trustees except for criminal conduct, failure to cooperate in the defense, or settlement of a claim without the consent of the governmental entity employer.

## Other State Laws and Local Ordinances

Many state and local laws not specific to public libraries will also be of interest to trustees. For instance, local zoning laws, parking restrictions, building codes and safety

restrictions need to be considered. Questions about these and other laws can be directed to the city or county attorney.

Want to learn more? Visit [Montana Library Laws](#) for more information and the text of these laws and relevant court and attorney general opinions.

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# Job of the board: set and monitor the library's budget

## Funding the Library

The Board is responsible for ensuring that there are adequate funds for all operations of the library. This vital function requires that Board members:

- understand library funding laws
- have a knowledge of funding sources
- develop a working relationship with the appropriate governing body
- be willing to seek prospective funding sources for the library
- explore ways of sharing resources with other libraries or community partners

Sound financial management by the Board of trustees is crucial to ensure ongoing library services for the community. To prepare a budget, you need to know where the funds come from and how much revenue you can expect each year. In Montana public library funding comes from local, state, and federal sources. Private funding sources are also important.

## Local Funding Sources

The major source of public library funding in Montana comes from local property taxes, either through a dedicated library mill levy or an appropriation from general funds. State law allows the governing body of a city or county with an established public library to levy a special tax in the amount necessary to maintain adequate public library service. This mill levy is approved through a vote of the people.

Libraries that receive funds from mill levies are eligible to receive prorated money from sources other than property taxes, such as ancillary taxes including motor vehicle taxes, oil and gas production taxes, motorcycle fees and so on. State law also allows the governing body of any city or county, to establish a library depreciation reserve fund. This money can be used to acquire property, make capital improvements, and purchase equipment necessary for library services. City or county funds allocated to the library but not spent at the end of the fiscal year can be transferred to the library depreciation reserve fund. The Board must request establishment of this fund.

Support for libraries differs considerably among cities and counties in Montana because taxable valuation and the amount levied varies from place to place.

The Board can explore local options with the city or county budget officer and should consider reviewing MCA 22-1-304 for more information on running a mill levy if the library needs additional funding.

## State Funding Sources

There are two state funding sources for Montana's public libraries: the Information Access Montana Act and funds from Coal Severance Tax. To receive this funding, public libraries must meet [the Public Library Standards](#).

### Information Access Montana Act

State aid to public libraries is provided through the Information Access Montana Act (IAMA) passed by the Montana Legislature in 1989. The act is designed to broaden access to existing information by strengthening public libraries, augment and extend services provided by public libraries, and permit new types of library services based on local need. IAMA is administered by the Montana State Library Commission.

IAMA funds may not take the place of general operating funds. The law allows the Commission to withhold these funds when there is a reasonable link between the reduction in local funding and the receipt or expectation of IAMA funds.

IAMA stipulates four types of state aid:

#### Per capita and per square mile.

This aid is based on a population distribution formula (See MCA 22-1-327 or ARM 10.102.4003). The amount of money received by individual libraries can change as the population distribution changes. These funds are distributed annually, and the local libraries receive the money by early November

#### Statewide interlibrary resource-sharing program.

The commission shall establish a statewide interlibrary resource-sharing program (See MCA 22-1-328 and ARM 10.102.4001.) The purpose of the program is to administer funds appropriated by the legislature to support and facilitate resource-sharing among libraries in Montana. These funds are currently used to reduce the cost of OCLC software used by libraries to borrow items from other libraries as well as the Montana Shared Catalog which is used by libraries to manage their collections. A subset of libraries shares their materials making it easy for their library patrons to request items from another library in the group.

#### Statewide Library Access Program.

This section (See MCA 22-1-329) authorizes the Commission to develop a voluntary statewide library access program whereby a participating library may allow access to the library's materials and services by patrons registered and in good standing with another library. There is currently no funding associated with this law.

## Coal Severance Tax

In 1979, the Montana Legislature designated that a portion of the state severance tax (See MCA 15-35-108 or ARM 10.102.5102) on coal mining go to the library federations to help local libraries provide basic services. The federation libraries receive the annual funds by early November. Each federation submits an annual plan of service to the Commission for approval of how the funds will be spent.

## Federal Funding Sources

On occasion, federal grants for specific programs become available for libraries. Trustees and directors can learn about these and other grant opportunities through library literature.

Two of the most common sources of federal funds for library services in Montana are the Library Services and Technology Act and the Telecommunications Discount Program (E-Rate).

### Library Services and Technology Act

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant program is designed to serve all types of libraries: public, academic, research, school, special and consortia libraries. Administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a federal agency, LSTA provides annual funding to all state library agencies to "develop library networks to share library information resources across institutional, local and state boundaries and to reach those for whom library use requires extra effort or special materials."

In Montana, the State Library Commission administers LSTA grant funds. The funds awarded to Montana are used for State Library programs, such as the Talking Book Library and Library Development services, or for statewide projects that provide specialized programming or services for Montanans. These funds often reduce the costs for local libraries.

### Telecommunications Discount Program (E-Rate)

Since 1997, the federal Telecommunications Discount Program has provided Montana libraries discounts on eligible telecommunications services ranging from 20 percent to 90 percent, depending on economic need and location. Commonly referred to as the "E-Rate program," it is administered through the nonprofit Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), which was established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to implement the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The Schools and Libraries Division of USAC administers the schools and libraries program.

Services covered by E-Rate are: Category 1: Internet access services, and Category 2: Acquisition and installation of equipment to provide networked access to the Internet. To apply for E-Rate discounts, a library must meet the Montana Public Library Standards.

There are also federal requirements that must be met depending upon the type of discount the library requests.

## Other Funding Sources

As funding needs increase many libraries seek grants from foundations, corporations, endowments, and government agencies. Local businesses are another option. Boards can solicit funds from these businesses directly or determine if the business has a community support program. The Board might also want to explore partnerships with civic organizations for special products or fund-raising activities. Possible groups include the Kiwanis, Rotary Club, Jaycees, Lions, League of Women Voters and local youth groups.

Another consideration for the Board is to encourage endowments from individuals or memorials in the form of gifts to the library. Some Montana libraries have gone a step further and established their own foundations. A library foundation functions as a separate entity and can attain nonprofit tax status from the Internal Revenue Service, so that gifts are tax deductible for the donors. Establishing a library foundation also opens up the potential of funds from other foundations that do not give grants to tax-supported agencies.

## Building the Budget

Once you know where funding comes from and how much you can expect, you can prepare the budget. Budgeting is vital to the library's planning process and one of the most important Board functions.

The budgeting process includes the following steps:

1. Define the library's goals for the upcoming year based on the library's long-range plan. What does the library need? Base the budget on those needs. The budget will change as the goals change.
2. Gather information to project costs of providing services and meeting the year's goals.
3. Estimate potential income from taxes, gifts, fines, fees, grants, and any other possible source of income.
4. Compare costs and income to see if all the goals can be met. If income exceeds or equals costs, the budgeting process continues.
5. Adjust objectives if funding doesn't cover goals, or search for additional funding. Present the adopted budget to the funding body.

The Board and the director work on the budget together but, ultimately, the Board is responsible for its approval. The director and a board member will typically present it to the entity with funding authority, within the required time frame and procedural steps. It is important for Board members to support the budget and speak out for library funding.

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## Sample Budget Planning Calendar

Based on a July 1 to June 30 Fiscal Year

July	Review fourth quarter budget report. Review goals, objectives, and strategies for past fiscal year. Make adjustments for present fiscal year if needed.
August	Review final annual report for just-ended fiscal year.
September	Begin work on needs assessment for next year. Brainstorm approaches. Delegate follow-up-effort (director, committee).
October	Review first quarter report. Evaluate objectives and strategies in progress.
November	Review present costs and projections. Review current needs assessment; brainstorm possibilities for responses. Reach agreement on prioritized needs.
December	Review goals and objectives for present year. Establish goals and objectives for the coming year based on staff, community, and other input, as well as agreements of previous month. Distribute goals, objectives with request for appropriate strategies and budget requests.
January	Review second quarterly report. Review strategies and budget requests. Prioritize by objective established in November. Library board should assign committee (if not already done) to work with director to prepare draft budget for board review. Request projected revenue information.
February	Board should review draft budget prepared by director and committee.
March	Board should consider holding a public hearing on draft preliminary budget. Adopt preliminary budget.
April	Submit preliminary budget request or certified budget to funding body.
May	Continue to work with submitted request or budget. Review third quarter budget report. Adopt final budget for next year and submit to appropriate authority.
June	Review and finalize any adjustments in closing out the present year.

## Following the Money

Boards have control over the library's expenditures. While the Board should delegate the power to purchase materials, supplies and other goods to the library director, it should be aware of all purchases and monitor the budget monthly throughout the year.

The director should provide the Board with a monthly statement or local government provided financial reports that show:

- total monthly and year to date income
- cash on hand
- total monthly and year to date expenditures by budget category
- a list of library accounts including the library depreciation reserve fund and any trust fund or donation accounts

When reviewing the reports, look for yearly patterns of expenditures, such as energy bills in the winter, fees for building repairs or grounds maintenance in the summer, special program costs such as those associated with summer reading programs, and purchases of supplies and materials that occur once or twice a year.

This is also a good time to compare budget figures with actual amounts. Is the income as you expected? If not, the Board needs to find out why and adjust in the budget if necessary. Compare actual expenditures with budget amounts as well. Unusually high and low expenditures need to be explained by the director. If costs are greater than expected, the Board might have to adjust the budget. You also need to know why funds are not being spent. Perhaps an under spent book budget means the staff does not have the time to make book selections and funding more staff is becoming a priority.

Want to learn more? Visit the [Budget and Finance](#) webpage for information about best practices and key things to know about monitoring the library's finances.

## Job of the Board: Setting Policy

Much of a trustee's work deals with policy - making policies, reviewing policies, and monitoring their effectiveness.

Policies set the direction for the library and protect it from misunderstandings. They are broad, philosophical guidelines, rather than specific procedures, addressing such areas as personnel, collection management, operations, program development and intellectual freedom.

Library policies should be based on community needs, the library mission statement, and established goals; they should not be a reaction to specific problems that arise.

A good set of written Board policies:

- Balances library resources and customer needs.
- Promotes consistency.
- Eliminates the need for instant (crisis) policy making.
- Clarifies Board member, director, and staff roles.

Trustees are responsible for making and adopting library policies, but policy development is best done in conjunction with the director and staff. Policies should be clearly written, organized in a policy manual, and made available to the staff and the public.

Every trustee should have a copy of the policy manual and be familiar with the rationale for each policy. Understanding the policies helps trustees knowledgeably adopt new policies or revise existing ones. This will also be helpful if you are called upon to defend or interpret policies to the public or governing officials.

Your Board should follow established policies but keep in mind that things change. The community's economic conditions or the growth or decline of the population, for example, may justify changes in library policies. Therefore, it is important for your Board to consider community needs and be flexible enough to revise or change policies as needed. Regular review will help ensure that the policies are accurate and up to date.

The State Library can answer questions your Board might have on developing policies and provide you with samples of specific policies developed by other libraries.

# Job of the Board: Community Relations

## Marketing the Library

Marketing means different things to different people. Some think it is advertising, others planning events, while still others see it as public relations. It is all those things and more. You can think of marketing as a broad range of activities that tie together the following four "Ps."

- Planning: developing an array of services (products) that the public (customers) wants
- Publicity: telling customers about the services
- Public relations: taking part in activities that help users and non-users develop a positive attitude about the library
- Politics: advocating for the library with elected officials

## Who Markets the Library?

The Board, individual trustees, the director, and the staff all have roles to play in marketing the library.

### *The Role of the Board*

- Establish a written communications and public relations policy.
- Support staff training and involvement in marketing the library.
- Budget for marketing and/or assist in obtaining volunteer specialists to help.
- Encourage the development of Friends of the Library and other volunteer programs where suitable.

### *The Role of Individual Trustees*

- Use the library.
- Talk about the library to friends and acquaintances.
- Keep county and city officials informed of library issues and of your continued interest in library matters. Participate in community activities.
- Listen to the community.

### *The Role of the Director/Library Staff*

- Develop the annual marketing plan and budget.
- Evaluate marketing efforts and regularly report on these to the Board.
- Analyze public relations needs, plans and budget. Assess public attitudes toward the library.
- Develop rapport with media, community groups, writers, artists, business leaders and other libraries. Coordinate special activities with community groups.

- Actively promote the library on television, radio, in newspapers. Provide friendly service to all members of the public.
- Attend appropriate training and continuing education events. Interpret library policies, procedures, and services to the public.
- Maintain community awareness.

## Media Relations

Typically, the director serves as the spokesperson for the library, and the Board chair serves as the spokesperson for the Board. Designating a media spokesperson can save the Board from unintentional and sometimes destructive misunderstandings.

Should a reporter call an individual at home to get a response to a particular issue, redirecting the reporter to the spokesperson will ensure that the Board's agreed-upon message is the message the reporter receives. The director should keep the spokesperson informed of all potentially newsworthy issues as they develop.

## Politics

Because libraries depend on public funds, politics are a fundamental part of marketing the library. As a trustee, your role is to be an advocate on behalf of the library and the citizens who use its services, extending your local public relations activities to elected officials to show them that public libraries are a factor in creating and maintaining sustainable communities. Get to know officials at all government levels and help them learn about the library and what it does for their constituents.

## Community Partners

Just as the public library promotes the common good of the community, so too can the community work to promote the good of the library. Two community organizations can help sustain local public libraries: Friends of the Library and a local library foundation.

### Friends of the Library

In many Montana communities, citizens who support the public library have established Friends of the Library organizations. A Friends of the Library group is a nonprofit organization that voluntarily supports library causes and services. Each group has its own bylaws, board, committees, and policies, and sets its own goals. The Friends' role can be important, especially in small libraries with very limited budgets.

The Friends can serve as publicity agents for the library, sponsoring cultural and educational programs, as well as advocate for the library with local government. They can develop and coordinate volunteer services in cooperation with the library director and staff; organize fund-raising events; and encourage donations of materials, as well as bequests and endowments.

## Library Foundations

Library foundations can be a valuable funding tool to encourage gifts, bequests, memorials, and other monetary donations. The foundation board and staff, if any, also represent another partnership for the Board. As with the Friends organization, a local library foundation can be of immense help, but open communication is key. The Board and the foundation need to work in concert for the good of the library.

A library foundation functions as a separate entity and can attain nonprofit tax-exempt status (known as 501c3) from the Internal Revenue Service, so that gifts may be tax deductible for the donors. Establishing a library foundation also opens the potential of funds from other foundations that do not give grants to tax-supported agencies.

## Libraries and Library Organizations

Montana's library system has grown significantly since the state first started to support the system in 1929. All of Montana's publicly funded libraries work in partnership with one another and their local communities to form information networks and provide a better return on the citizens' investment. With improved cooperation among different types of libraries and better access to expanding technologies, Montana libraries are improving access to information locally, regionally, and internationally.

[ASPeN, a directory of all the libraries in Montana](#), is available online on the State Library web site.

In this section, you will find some of the libraries and library support organizations that you will come in contact with as a trustee. Many of these can provide valuable support in helping you to be an effective trustee.

## Montana State Library

The Montana State Library provides assistance and advice for all public libraries in the state, administers federal and state grant funds made available to Montana for library purposes, provides library services for people who have visual, physical, and/or reading disabilities that makes using traditional print difficult. The Commission which is the governing board for the Montana State Library also acts as a state board of professional standards and library examiners.

## Services for libraries

Montana State Library staff provide support to libraries

- by answering questions about library administration, management, and services
- managing statewide projects such as the Montana Shared Catalog, Montana Library2Go, and other services used by libraries to provide access to library materials

- by creating and supporting programming efforts in libraries that encourage literacy, learning, and connection
- by providing training and continuing education opportunities for library staff and trustees across the state

## Montana Library Federations

Public libraries in Montana are organized by region into federations which are groups of libraries working together to provide a broader range of resources and services than individual libraries alone can offer. These federations were developed by the Montana State Library Commission to give all Montanans access to library resources within their region, the state, and the nation.

## Montana Library Association (MLA)

This state association works to promote library interests and development, raise the standards of library services in Montana and provide continuing education for lay people and professional growth opportunities for librarians. Through membership in MLA, trustees get to know library trustees from across the state.

MLA represents all types of libraries, public library trustees and members of Friends organizations within its divisions and interest groups. MLA standing committees work on a variety of library-related issues including government affairs, intellectual freedom, marketing, and professional development.

## Job of the Board: Planning for the Future

Strategic planning is a duty of the Board. It takes some hard work, but once completed, a written plan serves as a road map to guide the Board and the library director as they make decisions about how the library can allocate resources to best meet community needs.

Although your library might be doing a good job in meeting some of the needs of your community, it is likely that other needs are going unmet. The best way to identify how the library can better serve the community is to include community members in the planning process.

After learning about community needs, the library board and director can identify which ones the library can help meet either directly or through community partnerships. Prioritizing these needs, brainstorming how to meet them, and turning them into goals and objectives is how the board creates a strategic plan for the library.

After the strategic plan is in place, it becomes the basis for how the library operates. As the Board considers other elements of library services, it can use the strategic plan as the starting point for planning for facilities, technology, and public relations.

### Planning for Facilities

The typical public library serves the community with a variety of programs and a diverse collection of materials. The Board needs to determine if the facility meets the current needs of the library as well as its future needs based on the plan. Will there be a need for more meeting rooms? Do services focus on a particular user population, such as children or seniors? Will that change over time?

### Planning for Technology

In addition to short-term issues, such as periodic upgrades of computer equipment, the Board must also consider long-term technology issues. For example, if digitization of local history was identified as a community need, the library might require a different set of technology and equipment than it currently owns. The strategic plan will be the guide for developing a technology plan that reflects the community's priorities.

### Planning for Disaster

Disaster response and prevention is essential for the continuation of library business. A written disaster plan will help ensure the health and safety of the staff, decrease the amount of time it takes to begin recovery, and increase the recovery rate for materials.

When preparing a disaster plan:

- Consider types of disasters most likely to happen, including the possibility that the entire building or collection might be destroyed.
- Consider what services would be most affected if patrons and staff did not have access to the building and its collections.
- Determine who has the decision-making authority in the case of a disaster to close the library, contact the insurance company, assign staff to the recovery effort, hire temporary staff if needed and serve as media spokesperson.

It is the director's responsibility to ensure that the staff is knowledgeable about emergency procedures, but trustees should be familiar with them as well. One of the Board members might be responsible for having a copy of the disaster plan stored at home in case the library copy is damaged or is inaccessible.

Want to learn more? Review the [Strategic Planning Handbook](#) or one of the [short videos about planning for the library](#).

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# Job of the Board: Managing Personnel

## Working with the Director

How the Board interacts with the library director can have as much impact on library services as anything else the Board does. The two must work together closely, but they have very distinct areas of responsibility. Building a relationship of mutual respect and clear communication will ensure that both the Board and the director can do their jobs well.

The first thing to realize in working with the library director is that the director reports to the Board as a whole, not to individual trustees. Therefore, a trustee cannot give orders or suggestions to the director unless the action is approved by the entire Board.

The Board's role is to define the director's duties in a written job description and work with the director to prepare an annual work plan based on the library's long-term plan

The Board needs to be aware of what the library director does as part of the Board's accountability to taxpayers. The Board should consider conducting an annual evaluation of the director's performance, but the Board needs to have additional processes for staying current on the director's activities. A monthly report from the director can help the Board stay apprised of the director's current work.

## Salary and Benefits

Compensation is often the hardest issue to deal with as a Board trustee. Although wages are a basic element in job satisfaction, low pay is a problem in the library field as a whole and particularly in rural areas where city and county budgets are tight. Nonetheless, it is up to the Board to try to ensure that the director receives competitive salary and benefits. The director is a key factor in the quality of services a library can provide its community.

The board should work with local government officials to negotiate fair wages for library staff. Generally, libraries are a part of local government so the Board will need to comply with local policies when offering salary and benefits.

## Continuing Education

Because librarianship is always changing, it is important that the library director stay informed about innovations and advancements in the profession. Continuing education is the best way to do this. In fact, the director is required to participate in continuing education under the [Public Library Standards](#) which the library must meet to be eligible for state aid. The standards state that directors must be certified through the Montana Certification Program for Library Directors, Staff and Trustees. Certification and renewal

of certification specify the number of continuing education credit required and the time allowed for earning the credits.

Because continued education is so important, the Board is strongly encouraged to support the director's efforts to attend training. This includes both approval of time off with pay to travel to workshops and conferences, and financial assistance for registration fees and other expenses. A director should not be asked to attend continuing education opportunities on personal time or at personal expense. A director who is well trained and who continues to learn about the library profession is an asset to the library and the library's patrons.

## Common Missteps

There are legal limits to what the Board can ask of its library director. One of the most common mistakes made by Boards is asking the library director to work more hours than they are paid for which can go against the Fair Labor Standards Act. The law actively discourages asking people to volunteer for tasks that are part of their paid duties.

Don't micromanage. After the Board and the library director have agreed on the director's job responsibilities, the Board must let the director take the lead. Problems need to be addressed, but even in these cases, the situation needs to be handled with respect. Step back and ask yourself if there really is a problem or if the situation is just a difference of opinion or style. There are different ways to reach the same goal of providing the community with excellent library services.

## Evaluating the Director

Trustees evaluate the director all the time by what they see in the library, what they hear from the public and what they perceive as the library's reputation in the community. But that informal consideration does not take the place of a formal review of the director's performance.

There are several good reasons for an annual evaluation. It:

- Provides the director with a clear understanding of the Board's expectations and its perceptions of how those expectations are being met.
- Identifies the Board's concerns and initiates a procedure for actions to be taken.
- Creates an opportunity to review and acknowledge the director's accomplishments as well as to establish a record of unsatisfactory performance if there is ever cause to terminate employment.
- Demonstrates sound management and accountability to community officials and the public.
- Gives the director an idea of where to focus future efforts

Boards often delegate the task of developing a preliminary evaluation of the director to the personnel committee. The key is to be consistent and decide ahead of time who will take part. Although a special committee can do the preliminary evaluation process, the entire Board should review, discuss, and approve the final written evaluation.

All discussions of the director's job performance should be carried out in legally posted and conducted meetings.

## Director Turnover

### Hiring the Director

One of the Board's most important responsibilities is hiring the director.

The needs of your library and your community will determine who will be the best person to fill the position. One Board may decide that imagination and energy are the most important characteristics the new director needs to have. Another Board might put more emphasis on administrative experience, while still others on education and library experience. Whatever combination of expertise and vision your Board determines is needed, the guiding directive should be that the Board is responsible for hiring the best candidate possible to direct the library.

### Working with the Library Staff

Although decisions by the Board affect working conditions, salaries, and other aspects of typical employer/employee relationships, you as a trustee need to understand and respect the chain of command in which the director reports to the Board and the staff reports to the director. The law does give the Board the authority to hire, discharge, set salaries, and prescribe duties of the library staff, and in many cases a director may value the input of the Board when hiring. However, once someone is hired the relationship between the board, director, and staff is a delicate one. It may become confusing for staff if the board is involved in the day-to-day operations of the library. This might lead to a decrease in productivity.

The best practice would be for the Board to delegate hiring, supervising, and evaluation of the library staff to the library director. This can be done through Board bylaws or a decision/motion from the Board. The director is the one overseeing day-to-day operations and is probably the best person to identify what skills and abilities are needed for a particular position as well as to give constructive feedback to staff when there are problems. This also helps create a clearer chain of command which is helpful for staff.

Want to learn more? Review the [Personnel Support page](#) which includes handbooks, a salary dashboard and short video about personnel management.

# Trustee Support

Successful trustees and boards make for successful libraries. To help with your ongoing success, MSL consulting librarians and the Continuing Education Coordinator regularly support boards on a variety of matters. We look forward to working with you.

- Library board development/training
- How to run effective and legal meetings
- Government relations
- Library budgeting and finance
- Policy development
- Personnel policies and procedures
- Planning and evaluating library goals
- Library facilities
- Information about laws and rules
- Continuing education

## Additional Resources

- State Library staff maintain several [handbooks and information guides](#) for trustees.
- Sign up for our monthly [Public Library Trustee Newsletter](#).

## Questions? Contact Us!

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# Appendix 1

## Sample Trustee Job Description

### *Summary*

Provides governance for the Public Library; establishes policy; sets goals; hires and evaluates director; establishes and monitors annual budget; signs necessary contracts; exercises such other powers, not inconsistent with law, necessary for the effective use and management of the library.

### *Responsibilities*

- Participates in the ongoing responsibilities of the governing body, including establishment of library policies, budgeting, evaluating, and supervising the library director, working with local and state government officials, and planning for current and future library services and programs.
- Attends all regular and special meetings of the Board and participates in committees and activities as necessary; attends appropriate library functions.
- Represents the interests and needs of community members.
- Lends expertise and experience to the organization.
- Maintains an awareness of library issues and trends, and the implications for library users.
- Acts as liaison with the public, interpreting and informing local government, media and public of library services and needs.
- Understands pertinent local and state law; actively supports library legislation in the state and nation.

### *Qualifications*

- Is interested in the library and its services.
- Has the ability to contribute adequate time for effective participation in Board activities and decision making.
- Has the ability to represent needs and varied interests of the community at large and the library.
- Has strong interpersonal and communication skills.
- Has the ability to work with governmental bodies, agencies, and other libraries.
- Has the ability to handle opposition and make decisions in the interest of library service.

### *Time Commitment*

The Board of Trustees meets monthly at a time convenient for members. Special meetings or committee meetings may be called as necessary at times that are convenient to members and that comply with open meeting laws.

Under Montana law, trustees hold their office for five years from the date of appointment and until their successors are appointed. Members serve no more than two full terms in succession.

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## Appendix 2

### Calendar of Annual Events and Deadlines

Trustees can take part in numerous events, activities and continuing education (CE) opportunities. This calendar shows the typical schedule, as well as the timing for important Board decisions. Deadlines and specific Board duties are coded with a "B."

Month	Events and CE Opportunities	Deadlines
<b>January</b>		Review library policies (B)
<b>February</b>	MSL Commission meeting	Complete preliminary budget (B)
		Review library policies (B)
<b>March</b>	Spring Federation meetings	Adopt preliminary budget (B)
<b>April</b>	MLA annual conference	Submit preliminary budget to funding body (B)
	MSL Commission meeting	Review library policies (B)
	Spring Federation meetings	
<b>May</b>	Spring Federation Meetings	
		Review library policies (B)
		Federation plans of service due
<b>June</b>		Close out budget for current year
	MSL Commission meeting	Complete Board evaluation for past year (B)
		Complete Director evaluation ( <i>for libraries using FY calendar</i> ) (B)
		Adopt and submit final budget for upcoming year (B)
		Review library policies (B)
<b>July</b>		Public Library Standards form due
		Review library policies (B)
<b>August</b>	MSL Commission meeting	Approve and submit final annual report to governing body and MSL (B)

<b>Month</b>	<b>Events and CE Opportunities</b>	<b>Deadlines</b>
	Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA) annual conference	Governing body approves and adopts final budget (B)
		Review library policies (B)
<b>September</b>	Fall Federation meetings	Federation annual reports due
		Review library policies (B)
<b>October</b>	Fall Federation meetings	Review library policies (B)
	MLA Fall retreat	
	MSL Commission meeting	
<b>November</b>	State aid/federation funds sent to libraries.	Review library policies (B)
		MSL Library Directory information and MSL Public Library Annual Statistics data due
<b>December</b>	MSL Commission meeting	Review library policies (B)
		Complete Director evaluation ( <i>for libraries using calendar year</i> ) (B)

For details about events, [visit the online Event Calendar in ASPeN.](#)

## Appendix 3

### Types of Public Libraries and Board Authority

#### City

Guiding MCA	MCA 22-1-303 thru 311
Method of Creation	Vote of the people and/or city resolution
Board Appointment	Mayor/City Council
Budget/Financial Authority	City has authority over tax revenues; Board has authority over line items, setting and monitoring budget, approving claims, accepting grants/donations. Board reports to city. Library budget and financials follow Local Government Budget Act
Facilities/Property	Board owns property in the NAME of the city; board has authority over library space and can make changes to library; board can purchase property
Personnel Management	Board hires, sets duties, salary for chief librarian and library staff
Contracts	Board has authority to sign contracts
# of Libraries	22

#### County

Guiding MCA	MCA 22-1-303 thru 311
Method of Creation	Vote of the people and/or county resolution
Board Appointment	County Commissioners
Budget/Financial Authority	County has authority over tax revenues; Board has authority over line items, setting and monitoring budget, approving claims, accepting grants/donations. Board reports to county. Library budget and financials follow Local Government Budget Act
Facilities/Property	Board owns property in the NAME of the county; board has authority over library space and can make changes to library; board can purchase property
Personnel Management	Board hires, sets duties, salary for chief librarian and library staff
Contracts	Board has authority to sign contracts
# of Libraries	28

#### Joint City-County

Guiding MCA	MCA 22 1-314 thru 317
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Method of Creation	Interlocal agreement – may have been a vote of the people
Board Appointment	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally a mix of city and county
Budget/Financial Authority	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally board has authority over line items per MCA 22-1-309
Facilities/Property	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally the board has the same authority as MCA 22-1-309
Personnel Management	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally board has authority outlined in MCA 22-1-310
Contracts	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally board has authority to sign contracts per MCA 22-1-309
# of Libraries	18

### Multi-jurisdictional Service District

Guiding MCA	MCA 7-11-1102 and 1112
Method of Creation	Vote of the people
Board Appointment	Determined by interlocal agreement
Budget/Financial Authority	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally board has authority over line items per MCA 22-1-309
Facilities/Property	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally the board has the same authority as MCA 22-1-309
Personnel Management	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally board has authority outlined in MCA 22-1-310
Contracts	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally board has authority to sign contracts per MCA 22-1-309
# of Libraries	5

## Independent Library District

Guiding MCA	MCA 22-1-7
Method of Creation	Vote of the people
Board Appointment	Elected
Budget/Financial Authority	Board works with county; has full authority over budget and line items within the limits of the dedicated property tax mill levy voted on by the community
Facilities/Property	Board owns library property
Personnel Management	Board hires, sets duties, salary for chief librarian and library staff
Contracts	Board has authority to sign contracts
# of Libraries	4

## School/Public

Guiding MCA	MCA 22-1-312 and 7-11-1
Method of Creation	Interlocal agreement – partnership between school and local government
Board Appointment	Determined by interlocal agreement; generally a mix of school and local govt
Budget/Financial Authority	Determined by interlocal agreement; varies greatly depending on setup of library
Facilities/Property	Usually owned by the school district board and managed by the school district
Personnel Management	Determined by interlocal agreement; varies greatly depending on setup of library
Contracts	Determined by interlocal agreement; varies greatly depending on setup of library
# of Libraries	6 main libraries; 10 branches

### Notes:

The powers and duties of the board may change if the library is part of a local government structure that is a charter government. MCA 7-3-7 is what guides this type of government. The local government's charter will spell out the duties of the board.

Personnel management and facilities management may vary. MSL staff encourage libraries and local government officials to define each other's roles and expectations. We also encourage boards to use the personnel policies of cities and/or counties - with the addition of the role of the board in hiring, etc. of library directors and staff. Facilities management is sometimes handled entirely by the board or more often handled by both entities depending upon the nature of the work being completed.

Financial authority and how that works in each library varies depending upon whether the library is funded entirely through a dedicated library levy or funded by general fund.

There are 83 main public libraries. Many of those libraries have branches that may have a different structure than the main library. However - it's usually in the form of a school/community library. There are 34 branches.

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