

Saskatchewan Public Library Governance

BOARD PERFORMANCE

Board Performance - Introduction

So you think you've learned how to be a good board member? You discover the learning curve is never ending, and there's more required of a board member than merely understanding the role and attending the meetings.



Performance Assessment - Introduction

Evaluating board performance helps boards identify their strengths and weaknesses and to pass on challenges to new boards. Two exercises, Policy Review and Board Self Evaluation, can assist with this. Both exercises can be viewed on the SLTA website (www.slta.ca).

The documents can be used one of two ways:

- ▶ Boards can put the documents on the agenda of their last board meeting and pass on the results to the next board.
- ▶ Boards may wish to include the exercises as part of the orientation of new board members.

Remember, the performance of a board is dependent upon the performance of all its members. While the board is comprised of a number of individuals, it operates as a single unit – generally making it more difficult to evaluate as there are more players to consider.

Why is Board Development important?

Ongoing investment into board development will lead to excellence in governance.

Board development is comprised of activities intended to raise the quality of the board's performance to a new level.

Great governance doesn't happen by chance – there is always room to grow. The goal is to keep learning. Creating a board development plan ensures that the board is a value-added asset with the intellectual capital to rise to the challenge of these rapidly changing times. Through ongoing education the board can excel and successfully design its library's future.

Where to Begin?

There are two ways to determine where knowledge gaps on the board exist.

- ▶ The first is by following a guide (e.g. such as the one provided by The Leadership Development Toolkit – <http://www.accessola.com/olba>). It is a three part exercise available online to identify leadership and governance knowledge gaps of a board which can then be used as the basis for an education program.
- ▶ Alternately, a more informal approach may be preferred. A board can brainstorm to determine the contents of its own development program. Board members can identify what information they feel they lack or what they don't understand well enough to make informed decisions.. This information can then be used to develop an education session.

What are Board Development Activities?

Board development does not have to be costly or resource intensive. For example:

- ▶ Develop information sessions at the beginning of a board meeting (e.g. invite a staff member to give a presentation).
- ▶ Dedicate time in board meetings to discuss an article that all board members read in advance of the meeting.
- ▶ Read information materials, publications, and articles on library news.
- ▶ Network with other boards in person or electronically as a way to solve problems, increase knowledge, or gain a fresh perspective.
- ▶ Attend local board meetings.
- ▶ Attend annual conferences.
- ▶ Evaluate the Board's performance for compliance with library policies and to measure the success of the annual plan.
- ▶ Access audio conferences or webinars.

Code of Ethics - Introduction

A code of ethics is a useful tool to deal with important issues regarding the board's conduct. A code of ethics sets out how the board will handle issues, such as conflict of interest, confidentiality, and limits on board member's actions. While legislation often exists governing how boards must deal with certain issues, others are left to individual boards to manage. Discussing how to handle certain issues prior to becoming embroiled in them, prepares the board for action, rather than rendering it incapable if a serious issue arises. The code of ethics is an expression by a board of its agreement to conduct business in a particular way. It is, in effect, a commitment to carrying out its job with decorum.

Key Points to Consider:

- ▶ Confidentiality: Board members should realize that what is discussed in meeting stays within the meeting. Transparency does not mean the public is privy to the discussion in the meeting. The public needs to know about the decisions the Board makes – not the discussion.
- ▶ Support: Individual Board members are obligated to support the decisions of the Board in public. Within the confines of the meeting, debate and disagreement is appropriate but once the Board makes a decision, all of the Board must support the decision. If in all conscience you cannot support the decision resignation is appropriate.
- ▶ Unity: Any Board must speak with one voice and that voice is vested in the board chair. Individual Board members ought not to speak on behalf of the Board or direct staff in the operation of their duties.
- ▶ Professionalism: Board members are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Petty grievances, personal likes and dislikes have no place in the Board room.

Effective Meetings - Introduction

Boards are required to establish procedures for governing the conduct of their meetings. Board's often use a parliamentary authority such as *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* by Alice Sturgis to be referred to when the board's own procedures are silent. It is important that a board has a clear process for trustees to add items to an agenda and that all understand the board's procedures.

All relevant information should be distributed at least week before the meeting. The chair and senior staff should be advised in advance if you plan to bring up a subject at the board table that has not been included on the agenda.



Saskatchewan Library Trustees' Association

Rules of Order

Often meetings follow a pattern similar to the following:

- ▶ Call to order
- ▶ Approval of agenda
- ▶ Approval of minutes of prior meetings
- ▶ Announcement of motions from private session (in-camera) meetings
- ▶ Receiving delegations
- ▶ Business arising from the minutes
- ▶ Unfinished business
- ▶ New business
- ▶ Adjournment

Consent Items

Boards do not need to take votes for every item on the agenda. Items like approving the agenda, approving the minutes, or adjourning the meeting can be considered consent items. Several routine items can be grouped into a consent agenda that allows passage with just one motion (e.g. "Do I have a motion to accept the consent agenda?").

Welcoming Delegations

Formal procedures are useful for dealing with delegations. Unless a board explicitly decides to go in camera, board members must be prepared to work cooperatively with individuals and groups. A formal procedure known to the public will help the board manage such events.

The board chair may wish to state: "In responding to questions raised at board meetings or presentations from delegations, the board reserves the right to withhold a response until all board members feel sufficiently well-informed on the matter."

How to Chair Meetings Effectively - Introduction

A chair must provide leadership and direction. A chair should learn how to chair meetings effectively and decisively. Chairmanship is a learned skill. It has to be practiced and perfected. A chair is considered successful when he provides opportunity for everyone to be heard, gives appropriate rulings and protects the minority while abiding by the majority decisions.

Purpose of a Meeting

The purpose of any meeting is to get results. A good agenda encourages this. Whoever creates the agenda should be able to specify why each item is there and what the board is expected to do about it.

The board must give clear direction for items that must be referred to a committee or for discussion at a later date. Motions of referral should state when the item will return for consideration and indicate whether public involvement will be sought.

Complicated items that may require a lot of attention should be placed near the beginning of the meeting and schedule more routine items toward the middle or end. Consider putting a unifying item near the very end of the meeting so that people leave with a positive feeling.

Deal constructively with side issues when they occur. Deal with the person in a respectful way, especially if progress is to be made. Here are three strategies:

- ▶ Park them – Issues are parked with the understanding that they will be brought forward at a more appropriate time. Trust and credibility rest on ensuring these issues are dealt with eventually.
- ▶ Refer them – The group agrees the issue is off-topic and suggests a more appropriate setting or group refer the issue to.
- ▶ Allow time out – The group agrees on a length of time to go off-topic to discuss different perspectives.

Time Efficiency

Starting and finishing on time is good practice for board meetings. Stating the anticipated start times for each item allows the meeting planner to determine more accurately what can and cannot be included in the agenda, and encourages members to move through each item in a timely manner.

Another important time management feature if breaks. Any meeting that is expected to take more than two hours should include at least one 10 to 15 minute stretch break.

You will know that a meeting has been effective when all participants feel that:

- ▶ The meeting had a purpose.
- ▶ They have a sense of accomplishment.
- ▶ They contributed to the discussion.
- ▶ They were valued by others.
- ▶ Creative ideas, alternatives or solutions were generated.
- ▶ They were able to share different points of view.
- ▶ They are committed to the decisions that were made and the actions taken.
- ▶ They are willing to work together again.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ Are trustees well-informed and confident about meeting processes?
- ▶ Does the board use meeting time effectively and efficiently?
- ▶ Are delegations to the board given a proper hearing?
- ▶ Are members of the public aware of why items are referred and clear on when they'll be brought back to public session?
- ▶ Do board members keep in mind goals and principles noted in the goal-setting process during discussions of board business?
- ▶ Once the board has made a decision, do all trustees speak with one voice to the media and to the public?

Ten Commandments for the Chair

- ▶ Be prepared.
- ▶ Be prompt.
- ▶ Be punctual.
- ▶ Be strict.
- ▶ Be impartial.
- ▶ Be honest.
- ▶ Be rational.
- ▶ Be humorous.
- ▶ Be current.
- ▶ Be knowledgeable.

References

- ▶ www.learn.bcsta.org/elements-effective-board-meetings
- ▶ Decision-Making Process, pp. 104-105, in Library Board Development Kit – 2010 – Section Nine – Policy: (Southern Ontario Library Service, 2010)
- ▶ Trustee Tips, Library Trustee Development Program, December 2000, Issue No.21.