

Board Orientation: Governance Instructions and Script

What to Bring:

Handouts (enough for each board member to have their own copy):

- Your library ordinance
- Code of Iowa, 392.5
- Duties and Responsibilities of the Library Board and of the Library Director (chart comparing role of library director and board)

Additional handouts if desired:

- Job Description, Public Library Board Members
- Handout: What Do Public Library Directors Do, Anyway?

At least one copy of the *Iowa Library Trustee Handbook*, 2009.

Script:

Thanks for attending this board orientation on library governance. Please feel free to ask questions any time. To respect everyone's time, I would like to keep the session to about _____ minutes.

This session is about library governance and will include:

- How are libraries governed?
- Roles of the mayor and city council, library board, library director
- What does the library ordinance say about the duties and responsibilities of the library board?
- How to change the library ordinance (Code of Iowa 392.5)

It's very important that we all understand library governance to:

- Prevent misunderstandings between the library director and the board
- Prevent misunderstandings between the library and the city
- Have a well-run library that serves the community

► Handout: Your library ordinance

To start out, we are first going to talk about something called the library ordinance. In Iowa, a public library is established by an ordinance adopted by the city council. It is the “law” under which the library exists and it is part of the city code. Most questions about library governance are answered in the library ordinance. Information such as:

- How board members are appointed
- Powers and duties of the library board such as setting librarian and staff salaries, controlling library funds
- Procedure for approving and paying bills

Please take a few minutes to read through our library ordinance and then I’m going to ask you some questions about it.

[Note: Wait three to four minutes and then ask.]

- What is the “selection” process for individuals who are interested in serving on the public library board?
- What is the length of board members’ terms?
- Who employs the librarian?
- Who approves the bills?
- Anything in the library ordinance that surprised you?
- How does the library board’s authority compare to that of other city departments?

You’ve probably realized that the library board has more autonomy than other city departments and may be wondering why.

- The library provides information from all points of view. An autonomous board shields the library from political pressure and safeguards intellectual freedom.
- Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction.
- To illustrate, let’s consider a controversial subject such as hog lots or stem cell research. A library should have information about these subjects from different points of view regardless of the views of elected officials.

It’s important for you to know how to change the library ordinance.

► Handout: Code of Iowa, 392.5

This part of the Code says, “*A proposal to alter the composition, manner of selection, or charge of a library board, or to replace it with an alternate form of administrative agency, is subject to the approval of the voters of the city.*”

As examples, this means that if we want to change the number of board members, add a board member such as a rural resident or change the authority of the board (such as taking away or adding a responsibility), the proposed change needs to be voted on by city residents. The city council, alone, cannot change the library ordinance as far as number of board members, length of term, how they're appointed and their authority.

Now let's talk about the duties and responsibilities of the library board and the library director.

► Handout: Duties and Responsibilities of the Library Board and of the Library Director (chart comparing role of library director and board)

Start with the section on Staff. Discuss what the library board does as far as staff and what the library director does. Do this for each of the other sections

[Note: If you have knowledgeable and experienced board members at the session, take turns with them going over each of the topics on the chart. You could explain what the director does; board members could state what they do. This makes the session more interactive, but be sure the board members are accurate in what they say.]

[Note: If there is time, ask if there are any other questions.]

There is more information about the subjects we've covered in the *Iowa Library Trustee's Handbook*. You can obtain a copy by _____ .

[Note: To purchase additional copies of the trustee handbook, send your order to fran.fessler@lib.state.ia.us. The latest edition is 2009 and the handbooks are \$6.00 each. The State Library will mail the handbooks to you with an invoice.]

Quick Evaluation:

[Note: Ask the board these questions and write down what they say. Use their comments for planning your next board orientation.]

- What information was the most helpful?
- When I do this again for new board members, is there anything you think I should do differently?

Thank you for coming. If you have any questions later on, please let me know.

[Note: For 30 minute session, end here. If you want a longer session, go over these two additional handouts.]

► Handout: Job Description, Public Library Board Members

► Handout: What Do Public Library Directors Do, Anyway?