

# Chapter 1: First Things First - Top Five Things Every Library Trustee Should Know

## 1. Get to know your library and the difference it makes in your community.

As a member of the library board, you help set the direction for your public library, a very important city service, particularly when it comes to quality of life. Get to know your library and the difference it makes in your community firsthand. Drop in to browse and read, attend a story hour, use a computer, check out a book.

“Public library” means different things to different people. For many, the purpose of a public library is to help children develop a love of reading. For others, it means a place that provides computers and Internet access to people who don’t have them at home. The public library may also be seen as an anchor for downtown businesses, a gathering place for the community, a source of books and movies for pleasure and recreation, or an institution vital to democracy because it provides access to information from all points of view.

Libraries add to the quality of life. Whatever role your library plays in the community, chances are it is one of the most heavily used city services. Statewide, about 66% of Iowans have library cards. From 2002 to 2012, annual visits to Iowa public libraries increased 25% to 19,383,824. Today’s libraries offer books and so much more: computers and the Internet; recorded books; meeting rooms; story hour; websites; book discussions; movies; newspapers; genealogy resources; databases you can access from home or work including downloadable e-books, magazines, music and movies; as well as coffee shops and drive-up windows.

## 2. Understand how the board’s role and the library director’s role differ.

Your public library director is the department head of a city service and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the library. The director acts as the professional/technical advisor to the library board on policy, finances, planning, library performance and more.

Some of the ways the roles of the library director and the board differ are:

- The library director may suggest or draft policies. It is the board that actually adopts the policies. Once a policy is adopted, the director and staff carry it out as they operate the library.
- The board hires and evaluates the library director while the director hires and evaluates other staff.
- The library director may draft a budget request; the board officially adopts the budget.

Use the chart in Chapter 11 to openly discuss the board’s role and the director’s role. Most conflicts can be avoided if the board and director understand and respect each other’s roles.

### **3. Be familiar with your 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 is part of the city code. Most questions about library governance are answered in the library ordinance. You will find information such as:

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

Ask the library director for a copy of the library ordinance.

### **4. Understand the board’s control over library funds.**

Library trustees have a great deal of control over library funds. As stated in most library ordinances, the board has “exclusive control of the expenditure of all funds allocated for library purposes...” and “all money appropriated by the council from the general fund for the operation and maintenance of the library shall be set aside in an account for the library.”

Another way of saying it is that, while the city council decides on total funding for the library, the library board has control over how it is spent. This includes the power to move funds from one line item to another. No library funds may be spent except by motion of the board. Invoices and bills are approved by the board and signed by the designated board authorities (usually the board president and secretary). After approval by the board, it is recommended that the bills be paid by the city clerk.

### **5. Respect the city’s obligation to account for all public funds received and expended.**

Iowa Code 384.20 requires the city to keep separate accounts of all public funds collected, received, or expended for any city purpose.

In a nutshell, what this means is that although the library board has authority over the library budget, the library must still report all income and expenditures to the city. Income includes donations to the library from private individuals. Once the library receives funding from any source, it becomes public funding and is subject to the requirements of 384.20.