

## Chapter 18: Developing and Adopting Policies

To do your board member job well, understand policy because that's where you'll be spending much of your time. Policies:

- inform everyone of board intent, goals, and aspirations
- prevent confusion among trustees, staff and the public
- serve as the basis for the rules and regulations governing the library's operation
- promote consistency of board action
- eliminate the need for instant (crisis) policymaking
- improve communication with the public
- clarify board member, director and staff roles
- give the director a clear direction from the board

Policy is a carefully designed, broadly stated, written guideline for actions and decisions of the library. It is a governing principle formally adopted by the board.

Policies flow from the library's mission statement and should be consistent with its mission. For example, if part of your library's mission is to support the formal education of K-12 students, then the library's collection development policy, hours open and services should support that mission.

A board should "develop" policy and not just "write" policy. Good policy grows out of a process of studying the issues and needs, gathering facts, deliberating the issues, writing the policy and reviewing the policy at least every three years. Once the board adopts policies, the board observes, interprets, evaluates and supports those policies. The board also modifies existing policies and creates new policies as needed to keep the library running well.

Using the board policies as general guidelines, the director and staff write procedures. For example, your library board may develop a policy for adding a DVD collection. The director and staff would then write procedures for purchasing materials for the collection, processing items purchased for the collection and other procedures necessary to manage the collection.

### Policy development includes these steps.

1) **Anticipate the need.** Unfortunately, many library policies are a direct result of a problem or even a crisis rather than a result of careful planning and foresight. A better way to identify need for particular policies is to anticipate problems and write policies before the problems occur. Although each library board should develop its own policies, sometimes it is helpful to review policies from other libraries before getting started. Iowa Library Services has some links to library policies on its website, <http://www.statelibraryofiaowa.org/ld>

2) **Gather the facts.** Most policies will grow out of recommendations from the library director. Your director is in touch with trends, problems and issues that require policies. Depending on the nature of the policy, you may want to seek legal counsel.

3) **Evaluate the proposed policy.** Is it:

- Necessary or is the issue already covered in another policy?
- Consistent with the mission statement?

- Compatible with other policies?
- Consistent with local, state and federal law? Review the policy to determine whether any provisions would be illegal under Iowa or federal law. For example, a library policy of "no animals or pets allowed" must provide an exception for Seeing Eye dogs and other support animals.
- Practical, enforceable and affordable?
- Reasonable (including reasonable penalties)? Let's say a library board decides to set the library's hours as 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Monday through Friday." Although it would not be illegal to set such hours, a court could find the policy to be unreasonable because, in effect, it denies library access to citizens who work or go to school during the day. The library board should also examine proposed policies to determine if any penalties are unreasonable. For example, it would be reasonable for a "no skateboarding in the library" policy to include a "penalty" that violators would be asked to leave for the rest of the day. It would not be reasonable to penalize the skateboarding patrons by banning them from the library "for the rest of their lives."
- Measurable? It is difficult, if not impossible, to enforce a policy fairly if the policy and penalty are not quantifiable. Policies should be written clearly so that library board members, library staff, and library patrons can read a library policy and know what constitutes a "violation" of the policy. For example, if a library has a policy which states that patrons will lose their borrowing privileges if they have "too many overdue books for too long," the definitions of "too many" and "too long" are not clear and may result in unfair application when interpreted by different staff members. On the other hand, a quantifiable policy states that patrons will lose their borrowing privileges if they have "library material which has been overdue for three weeks or longer and if the patron has not returned the material or paid the replacement cost or made arrangements with the library for payment."
- Broad enough to cover the subject completely?

Finally, could there be **discriminatory application** of the policy? In order to be legally enforceable, library policies must be applied fairly to all patrons. Courts will invalidate library policies which are not applied equally to all patrons and are used to discriminate against certain groups of patrons. For example, a "no sleeping" policy might be enforced against homeless patrons but not against other patrons (such as the mayor) who drift off while reading in a comfy chair. Some libraries might have "no noise" policies which they enforce only against tables of giggling adolescents but never against tables of loud-speaking adults.

4) **Write the policy.** The actual wording of the policy is best left to the library director or a task force of board members and the director. The actual policy may come to the board and back to committee for revision several times before it's finished.

5) **Adopt the policy.** Final approval of the written policy is a board responsibility.

6) **Establish a schedule for policy review.** Policies can become out of date. Regular review of board policies help keep them current and at the same time keep board members informed. The recommended way to review policies is to date every policy and revision to the policy and establish a review date. Then, make sure the board or a committee of the board examines each policy on or before that date and approves any changes. This makes it much less overwhelming.

When reviewing and rewriting existing policies, ask whether there is still a viable reason to have the policy in the first place. Some boards have eliminated long-standing policies which have outlived their original usefulness and have opted instead for a more positive image for the library in the community. These include policies such as overdue fines, rental fees, and restrictions of number of materials borrowed at one time.

7) **Place the policies in one manual.** The manual makes the process of learning board policy simpler for new board members and it makes application and interpretation of policies easier. A manual also makes the process of review and update of board policies much easier.

8) **Make the policy manual available to the staff and the public at large.** A paper copy of the policy manual should be available at the library; also put library policies on your website.

### **Suggested Items to be Included in a Library Policies Manual**

#### Administration and Governance

- Local library ordinance
- Board bylaws
- Conflict of interest
- Trustee recruitment, orientation and education
- Mission statement and planning documents

#### Circulation Policy

- Borrowers' eligibility and responsibilities
- Equipment use
- Fines and fees
- Open Access
- Registration
- Confidentiality of records
- Loan periods
- Lost/damaged materials
- Renewals and reserves

#### Collection Development

- Description of your community and its needs
- Purpose of collection
- Criteria used for selection; complaint and reconsideration procedures
- Statements concerning intellectual freedom (for example, ALA Library Bill of Rights, Freedom to Read, Freedom to View)
- Evaluation of collection including withdrawal / weeding of materials
- Cataloging, maintenance
- Gifts and donations including requests for appraisals; disposal of unwanted donations

#### Interlibrary Loan Policy

- Participation in state/national networks
- Fees, if any
- Interlibrary Loan Reimbursement program through Iowa Library Services

## Personnel

- Library director recruitment, hiring, evaluation (performed by the board)
- Library staff recruitment, hiring, evaluation (performed by the library director)
- Salary structure / salary scale
- Benefits such as insurance, retirement, workers compensation, vacation, sick leave
- Staff development / training / continuing education / travel
- Memberships such as Iowa or American Library Associations
- Staff conduct / dress code
- Disciplinary action / grievance procedures
- Promotions / demotions
- Resignation and dismissals
- Personnel records
- Job descriptions

## Public access computers and Internet Use

- Responsibility of user
- Statement prohibiting access to child pornography
- Statement that there is no guarantee of privacy when using a public access computer
- Confidentiality of computer use records

## Reference Policy

- Homework assignments
- In-person vs. telephone questions vs. electronic reference
- Online searches
- Reference Interview
- Reference back-up service

## Services and Programs

- Hours and services
- Holiday closing and weather closings
- Programs for children, teens and adults
- Meeting room (including ICN use if your library has an ICN room)
- Bulletin board and display areas
- In-house audiovisual use
- Art collections

## Other

- Customer service
- Marketing and public relations
- Unattended children
- Missing children
- Conduct in the library
- Friends groups and volunteers
- Library foundation
- Emergencies and disasters
- Severe weather
- Staff safety