

Chapter 4: Learning the Job

To carry out their duties effectively, trustees need information about the library's services, needs, and plans. They also need an understanding of the legal responsibilities of the library board and the relationship of the board to the city, and to the library director and other library staff.

Find out where to go for answers to your questions. Know the people and resources that will give you quick answers to tough questions. The director and other board members are the best sources for learning about the library. This handbook is designed to be a guide to the basics of good board membership and will also answer many of your questions.

Get to know the other people who serve on the board with you—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, the other part of the board team. There must be a very high level of trust between those who govern the library and the person they have chosen to manage the library. Board members and the director form the board team.

A good orientation will provide trustees with the answers they need to perform their duties confidently. The orientation program should be planned step by step by the library board, with the assistance of the library director. Orientation should start as soon as possible after a board member is appointed—before the first meeting, if possible. A sample trustee orientation follows:

Sample Trustee Orientation Outline

The board president (or library director or other board designee) should contact the new trustee to welcome him/her to the board and schedule the orientation session or sessions.

Immediately send the new trustee a packet that includes:

- bylaws of the board
- a list of board members, indicating terms of office and board officers
- board committee membership lists
- calendar of upcoming meetings
- a copy of this handbook

The orientation should include a tour of the library, with the director, to introduce staff and discuss library programs and services. Schedule a meeting/discussion with the library director and at least one other board member to become familiar with:

- the library ordinance including the board's duties and powers and how board members are appointed
- sources of library funding
- how the library is operated day to day
- the library's website
- how the library serves the needs of the community including the library's mission statement
- how the library could better serve the community
- the board's relationship to the library director, the library staff, and the city

- how the library is linked to other resources, other libraries, and Iowa Library Services
- recent library accomplishments
- any immediate problems the library faces

Later, share the following information with the new trustee:

- latest annual report
- long-range/strategic plan and progress to date
- technology plan
- library policies
- current and previous year's budgets
- board meeting minutes for the previous six months
- director's reports for the previous six months
- director's job description and the process used to evaluate the library director
- latest monthly statistical report and financial report
- organizational chart of the library staff with names and titles
- library board's annual calendar, including deadlines
- copy of public library standards, *In Service to Iowa, Public Library Measures of Quality*
- brochure or other concise information about your library

Continue to learn. As you gain experience on the board, you will continue to learn about library philosophy, services statistics, history, policies and much more. Ongoing development activities should be part of the plan for every board and every board member.

To keep learning:

- Read the Iowa *Library Trustee's Handbook*
- Listen to and discuss the library director's report at board meetings
- Look for websites and blogs for library trustees including Iowa Library Service's web page, <http://www.statelibraryofiowa.org/ld/Trustees>
- Visit libraries in person or through their websites to see what they are doing.
- Take part in board development workshops offered by the Iowa Library Services and/or state and national associations.
- Join library associations such as Iowa Library Association, American Library Association, and Public Library Association; read their publications; attend their conferences.