INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your role as a trustee with the public library board. Working with the board and your library director, you are part of a governance team that is responsible to the community for providing public library service. Public libraries bring unique value to their communities as fee-free public spaces built on equitable access, privacy, and intellectual freedom while embracing inclusivity, diversity, and reconciliation. This quick guide is to get you started on what you need to know as part of the BC trustee community committed to excellent public library governance across the province.

1 GET FAMILIAR WITH THE BC LIBRARY ACT

The Library Act outlines how public libraries are established, governed and locally operated. There are 69 public libraries governed by library boards. Members are called trustees and are either elected or appointed. A public library is managed by a chief librarian, commonly known as the library director, who is appointed by the library board. Together the board and library director make up the governance team of a library.

The Library Act provides direction on the relationship between library boards and local governments. Local governments are the primary funder of public libraries. Establishing a collaborative and a strong working relationship between the library board, staff, and local government officials is an essential part of successful library governance.

The Library Act outlines the four types of public libraries in BC: municipal libraries, regional library districts, public library associations, and integrated public library systems. The powers and duties of each type of library board vary slightly, but all public library trustees have the same responsibilities and obligations. The Library Act also established six library federations to support libraries working together.

The Library Act defines each library board as an independent corporation. The board is the employer of the public library and has responsibilities for fulfilling its fiduciary duties such as electing a board chair, appointing a library director, and ensuring financial accountability.

The Role of the Libraries Branch

The Province, through the Ministry of Education, oversees the Library Act. The Libraries Branch is responsible for:

- Allocating funding and managing the accountability requirements (find out more on Libraries Branch Reporting and Accountability page)
- Helping boards to understand their governance responsibilities as they relate to the Library Act and other provincial government legislation
- Leading, supporting, and coordinating provincial programs and initiatives

Other Important Legislation and Policies

- Financial Information Act
- Freedom of Information and Privacy Act
- Local Government Act
- Community Charter
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom
- Employment standards and workplace safety

2 BUILD A STRONG GOVERNANCE TEAM

The board and the library director are the governance team. A successful public library has a governance team that operates with trust, transparency, respect, and open communication. This team is accountable to its members and to the community it serves. Most importantly, an effective governance team has clear roles and responsibilities; **the board governs and the library director manages**.

The Role of the Library Director

- Executes the strategic direction of the public library board and provides to the board accurate reports, including service and program assessments, and budget forecasts and updates
- Identifies and presents emerging issues and trends
- Manages the day to day operations of the public library including the staff, budget, programs, collections, infrastructure and facilities, communications and marketing, and partnerships

The Role of the Board

- Establishes the vision, mission, values, and strategic direction of the public library
- Provides support to and oversight of the role and responsibilities of the library director
- Participates in productive meetings and generative discussions that reflect duty of care and fiduciary responsibility
- Establishes a budget, aligned with the strategic direction of the organization, and provides oversight of the financial health of the public library including:
  - Reporting on the use of funds as required by legislation and other funding requirements
  - Ensuring financial policies are in place
- Delegates the operational day-to-day management, including the budget, human resources, and services to the library director

- Oversees and assesses the organization's strategic outcomes
- Establishes policies that:
  - Promote public library use
  - Support library staff
  - Ensure board fiduciary responsibility and duty of care
- Advocates for and champions the library

> The board as a whole, not the individual trustees, holds authority. The authority of the board is normally conveyed through the board chair unless it has been formally delegated. The board chair and the library director, working together, speak on behalf of the library.

3 FULFILL YOUR FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITY

It is expected that each trustee performs their board duties with the highest level of integrity and in the best interest of the public library.

4 PURSUE DUTY OF CARE

As a trustee, you are expected to perform your board duties with utmost care and thoroughness. Your board work needs to be informed and accurate to the level that would be expected by any reasonable person.

5 BE ENGAGED

You can be part of creating and sustaining an engaged library board by:

- Arriving to meetings on time, informed, and ready to contribute
- Asking open questions and participating in productive discussions that reflect duty of care of fiduciary responsibility
- Being informed of public library issues and values and what these mean for the community such as reconciliation, equitable access, diversity, inclusivity, privacy, and intellectual freedom
- Supporting your board chair and library director
- Being available for library and community events
- Championing the library at every opportunity

An engaged board has:

- A board development plan
- A succession plan
- Relevant and up-to-date policies
- A relevant and up-to-date strategic plan and assessment tools
- Expectations and support for all trustees to champion the library and to advocate for secure funding and sustainable library development

6 BE EFFECTIVE

You can be part of the ongoing development of an effective board by expecting and encouraging the following:

- An agenda developed by the board chair and the library director that reflects what is important for the board to know for oversight and assessment
- Use of a consent agenda
- Reports that are accurate, timely, and at the appropriate level of detail for board oversight and assessment
- Support of the board chair to competently and fairly chair the meeting
- Time for planned and purposeful board development
- Respect and use of the expert advisement from the library director
- Use of *in camera* for discussions and motions regarding land, law, and labour
- Transparency and accountability including having the following available on the public library's website:
  - Trustee names
  - Board contact information (for example: boardchair@publiclibrary.ca)
  - Meeting agendas and minutes
  - Strategic plan and annual report
  - Library policies
  - Process for public delegations to attend and/or present at board meetings
  - Process for becoming a member of the board

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

More information and resources available at:

- BC Government, Public Libraries
- BC Library Act
- BCLTA
    - BCLTA Governance Workshops
    - BCLTA Trustee Orientation Checklist

Also get to know the BC Public Library Partners:

- Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD)
- British Columbia Library Association (BCLA)
- BC Libraries Cooperative (BCLC)