Legal Issues for Library Boards

Thursday June 5, 2008
Westchester Library System

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Long Island University
Workshop Objectives

- Understand the Legal and Ethical Responsibilities of Trustees;
- Explore the Legal Basis for Public Libraries;
- Review the Rules for Conducting a Legal and Effective Board Meeting
Topics

- Duties and Responsibilities of Trustees
- Legal Structure of Public Libraries
- The Laws and Regulations that you should know
- Conducting a Legal and Effective Board Meeting
- Essentials of Library Policies
Do you Agree?

- That the library is an essential educational institution;

- That good governance is a necessity;

- Boards have the responsibility to oversee the Library in a professional manner.
Duties and Responsibilities of Public Library Trustees

- The Duty of Care: “to act in good faith”
- The Duty of Loyalty: “allegiance to the institution”
- The Duty of Obedience: “fulfill the mission”; comply with law

http://www.regents.nysed.gov/statement.html
Trustee Basics

Responsibilities:

- Meet Library standards;
- Conduct business publicly;
- Oversee Finances;
- Conform to applicable laws, regulations and decisions;
- Appoint Personnel;
- Establish Policies.
“The most important task of an organization’s leader is to anticipate crisis. Perhaps not to avert it, but to anticipate it.

To wait until the crisis hits is already abdication. One has to make the organization capable of anticipating the storm, weathering it, and in fact, being ahead of it.

It’s called innovation, constant renewal.”

- Peter Drucker
The Library Corporation

- Educational Corporations
- The Board of Regents
- Commissioner of Education
- State Education Department

http://www.counsel.nysed.gov/pamphlet9/home.html
Critical Documents

- Provisional and Permanent Charters
- Registration
- By-Laws
- Policies
- Minutes
- Audits
- Contracts & Other Legal Documents
By-Laws vs. Charter

- The **By-Laws** are the rules and procedures by which the Board of Trustees functions.

- The **Charter** is a legal document from the Board of Regents that incorporates the library, making it an *education corporation* that must meet certain standards of operation (Registration).

- The **By-Laws** must be consistent with the current charter, Education Law and the Education Commissioner's Regulations.
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Types of Public Libraries

- Who establishes public libraries?
- Public *vs.* Private
- Four Types of Public Libraries:
  - Association
  - Municipal
  - School District
  - Special District
Association Libraries

- Oldest and Most Prevalent
- Private not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organizations
- History & Methods of Organization
  - Typical Service Areas
  - Board Membership
  - Budgets & Taxes
  - Capital Projects
- Applicable Laws
Municipal Libraries

- Establishment
- “Public” aspects and applicable laws
- Relationship with municipality
- Budget development, presentation and independence
- Capital projects
School District Libraries

- Establishment by community
- “Public” aspects and applicable laws
- Legal structure and independence from School District
- Budget votes
- Trustee elections
Special District Libraries

- Establishment and definition of “Special District”
- Applicable laws
- Budgets and elections
A public library district is any library that:

- Obtains a substantial amount of its operating budget through direct public vote.
- Has a board of trustees that is elected by eligible voters within the library’s service area.
- Has an annual audit or financial review to ensure accountability.
Governing Laws

Public Library Law in New York State:

- [http://www.nyla.org/content/user_1/Public_Library_Law.pdf](http://www.nyla.org/content/user_1/Public_Library_Law.pdf)

Education Law – Critical Sections

- Section 216 – Charters
- Section 226 – Powers & Duties of Trustees
- Section 253 – Definition of a Public Library
- Section 254 – Standards
- Section 255 – Establishment
Education Law, continued

- Section 259 – Taxation
- Sec. 260 – Powers of Trustees; school district library authority
- Sec. 272 – Library Systems
Commissioner’s Regulations

- Authorized to establish regulations to implement law

- Most “popular:”
  - Minimum Standards – CR 90.2
  - Annual Reports
  - Direct Access – 90.3 d. (1)
Decisions and Opinions

- Decisions of the Commissioner of Education
- Opinions of the Office of the State Comptroller
- Opinions of the Attorney General
- Rulings of the Committee on Open Government
Laws for Public Institutions

- General Municipal Law
  - Bidding and Procurement
  - Conflicts of Interest
- Labor Law
  - Hour & Wage
  - Safety
  - “Wicks” Law
Laws for Public Institutions, continued

- Public Officers Law
  - Indemnification
  - Open Meetings
  - Freedom of Information

http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/coogwww.html

- Civil Service Law
  - Section 75
Laws for all Public Libraries

- Confidentiality of Library Records
  - Civil Practice Laws and Rules Sec.4509
- Open Meetings Law
  - Ed Law 260a
- Labor Law
  - Hour & Wage
  - Safety
Board Organization

- Elections and appointments
- By-Laws
- Committee Structure
- Absenteeism
- Collective Authority
- Consistency
Effective Board Meetings

- Conduct of Meetings
- Agenda - Essential Components
- Board President’s Role
- Director’s Role
- Secretary/Minutes
- Parliamentary Procedures
- Dealing with the Public
SAMPLE AGENDA

I. CALL TO ORDER
II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA
* IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD – March 5, 2003
V. PERIOD FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION
VI. CORRESPONDENCE
* VII. PERSONNEL REPORT
*VIII. TREASURER’S REPORT
   A. Report of receipts and disbursements
   B. Warrants
   C. Presentation of projected cash flow
IX. ADMINISTRATORS’ REPORTS
X. COMMITTEE REPORTS
XI. OLD BUSINESS
XII. NEW BUSINESS
XIII. PERIOD FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION
XIV. DATES OF FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS
   Wednesday, Dec 6, 2006
   Wednesday, January 3, 2007
   Wednesday, February 7, 2007
 XV. OTHER

Executive Session: Director’s Annual Performance Evaluation
* action required
Effective Board Meetings

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Legal

- Open Meetings Law
- Freedom of Information
- Meeting Notices
- Rights of Public at Meetings
- Quorum/Voting
- Rights/Liabilities of Individual Trustees
- Content of Minutes
- Executive Sessions
Financial

- Responsibility of Treasurer
  - (as appointed by Board)
- Responsibility of Finance Officer
  - (Board member)
- Content of Financial Reports
- Approval of Reports
- Vouchers/Warrants/Pre-pays
- Appropriate Use of Reserve Funds
- What Needs Approval, What Doesn’t
- Compliance with State Investment Policy
Personnel

- Standard Practices & Procedures
- Responsibilities for Selection
  - “Appoint” vs. “Select”
- “After the Fact” approval by Trustees
- Compliance with Civil Service Regulations
- Liability of Trustees for Non-compliance
- Termination
Library Policies

- Policies are the rules of the Library.
- Policies should be developed thoughtfully and revised regularly.
- Policies provide you and the library with legal protection.
- Policies are useless unless you and your patrons know them.
Essential Policies

- **Board Policies**
  - Meeting protocols
  - Ethics and conflicts of interest

- **Operational Policies**
  - Library hours and days open
  - Lending rules, Internet access, etc.
  - Patron behavior
Essential Policies, continued

- Collection Management
  - Selection
  - Intellectual Freedom
  - Challenges to library materials

- Facilities and Emergencies
  - Crisis management
  - Inclement weather
Essential Policies, continued

- Personnel Policies
  - Staff Manuals
  - Union Contracts
  - Employee acknowledgement

- The Library as a “Limited” or “Designated” Public Forum

- Sample Policies
  - [http://winslo.state.oh.us/publib/policies.html](http://winslo.state.oh.us/publib/policies.html)
Trustee Ethics

- Conflicts of Interest
  - General Municipal Law; Sec. 800
    - “no officer or employee shall have an interest in any contract with the municipality of which he is an officer or employee...”
    - Inclusion of family members
    - “Free” services prohibited
  - Application to Association Libraries
    - [http://www.ala.org/ala/alta/links/ethicsstatement.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/alta/links/ethicsstatement.pdf)
“We recently had a trustee openly criticize a board decision to move forward with a building referendum in the local paper, he went as far as to actively urge voters against the proposition.”
Trustee Information Resources

- Comptroller’s Opinions [www.osc.state.ny.us/legal/index.htm](http://www.osc.state.ny.us/legal/index.htm)
- NYS Attorney General’s Opinions [www.oag.state.ny.us/lawyers/opinions/opinion.html](http://www.oag.state.ny.us/lawyers/opinions/opinion.html)
- [http://www.westchesterlibraries.org/node/39](http://www.westchesterlibraries.org/node/39)
Westchester Library System Trustee Institute

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