

Chapter 4

Policies: AN ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRUSTEES

This chapter covers:

- ✓ The benefits of library policies
- ✓ Suggested policies for the library
- ✓ Places to find sample policies
- ✓ Elements of successful policies

General Description

One of the most important responsibilities of library trustees is the development of policies by which the library director, staff and trustees can make consistent service and administrative decisions. These policies must adhere to the library's mission statement and follow local, state and federal laws and provide fair treatment of patrons and staff. State statutes that may relate to policies may be found at:

<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/bestpractices/governance>

Policies guide all phases of library operation. They are not detailed descriptions of procedures. Thus, a circulation policy would be a broad statement of goals and objectives for this area of library service providing a framework on which those procedural details would be based. It is not a detailed list of steps on how to check out a book.

Because policies provide framework for actions and decisions, it follows that the library's mission statement, board by-laws and long-range plan are also considered policies. Libraries are also strongly encouraged to adopt these professional policies:

The Freedom to Read (from the ALA)

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/freedomreadstatement>

The Library Bill of Rights (from the ALA)

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

Two other federal acts bear prudent watching and may affect the policies the board will adopt:

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

The Patriot Act as it relates to confidentiality of records

Benefits of Policies

Properly developed and adopted policies:

- Support the overall library plans, goals and objectives
- Guide the library director and staff in implementing board judgments
- Provide direction and consistency in day-to-day service to the community and operation of the library
- Reduce uninformed decision-making and crisis responses to problem situations
- Protect the rights and assure fair treatment of all patrons and staff

Policy Development

Policies are needed by the director and staff as they carry out their jobs, so these persons usually research, develop and draft policies for presentation to the board for consideration and possible adoption. The board also may choose to write a policy or ask the director and staff to do so.

The following is a core list of policies most often needed by a library. Rather than start from scratch, it is often easier to work from policies developed by other libraries.

Sample policies on these and other subjects may be found at:

<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/help/samples>

Alcohol	Internet Policies
By-laws	Job Sharing
Cell Phones	Media
Circulation & Patron Registration	Meeting Rooms
Code of Conduct	Mission Statement
Collection Development	Museum Passes
Confidentiality & Privacy	Personnel
Conflict of Interest	Petitions
Discards	Proctoring
Donations, Gifts & Memorial Funds	Programs
E-Readers & Media Players	Public Access to Personal Computers
Exhibits and Bulletin Boards	Public Relations
Food & Beverage	Security Cameras
Financial Development	Service Animals
Foundations, Investments & Endowments	Social Media
History Room	Soliciting on Library Premises
Holiday Decorations	Staff Development
Home Delivery	Staff Use of Computers & Internet
Interlibrary Loan	Technology Plans
	Unattended Children/Vulnerable Adults
	Volunteers
	Warming/Cooling Station
	Weather-related Closings
	Whistleblowers

To be legally valid, a policy must be approved by the library board at a properly notified public meeting within the standards of the Freedom of Information Act. The approval date and any review dates should be noted (usually at the end of the policy), and the policy should be clearly documented in the formal board minutes.

Elements of an Effective Policy

An effective policy:

- Supports the mission statement
- Does not conflict with the by-laws or long-range plan
- Adheres to local, state and federal laws
- Does not conflict with other policies
- Treats staff and patrons fairly
- Is clear and understandable
- Does not include procedures

- Provides staff and board with clear direction for making decisions
- Follows the best library practices document

When the library board considers a policy for adoption, it should know:

- The subject of the policy
- The way the policy contributes to library goals
- The need for the policy
- Those it will affect
- The person(s) who developed it
- The elements to be included
- Possible options
- The legal ramifications
- The cost (in terms of staff time, budget, collection and facilities)
- The person(s) who should review it before approval
- The person(s) who will enforce it
- The person(s) who will inform and train staff
- The way new hires will be informed
- A regular schedule for review

Once a policy is approved, the library director is responsible for informing the staff and the public. The approved policy is to be supported by the board, the staff and the Friends of the Library, regardless of individual opinions.

Copies of the policy manual should be given to members of the board, involved municipal officials and the library staff and be easily accessible to the public by means including the library's web site.

Trustees should allow adequate time to consider policies before approving them. Policies also need to be reviewed, usually on a yearly basis. Researched and up-to-date policies will reduce trustee and staff liability as well as educate trustees and employees about the complex and varied issues within the library's concern. There also may be policies that trustees and the director will need to defend in a public forum.

Creating policies is hard work involving research, rewriting and time, but that work provides the framework for all phases of the library's operations. Through well thought-out policies library trustees protect that most important aspect of democracy, the freedom of information upon which all other freedoms depend.