

# Trustee

Trust-ee | /tre ' ste/

Noun

One to whom something is entrusted.

## Why a Citizen Library Board?

- ✓ Isolates library operations from political pressure.
- ✓ Ensures that the library collection is developed independently of any particular political viewpoint.
- ✓ Means the library is governed by the same people the library serves: the public.

## Library Advocacy

Being a library trustee means that you have been entrusted with the welfare of an important community institution capable of serving everyone in your community. As guardians of the public trust, a trustee's first loyalty is to the library and to the community it serves.

Understanding the value of the library and being able to communicate it with decision-makers is one of the most important obligations of a board member.

## The Board Governs- The Staff Manages

**Governance:** Library board members are responsible for the **direction** of the organization. They make major decisions including approving plans and policies. They are responsible for employing a qualified and competent library director. They also have an important advocacy role.

**Management:** The Director is responsible for the overall **operation** of the organization, implementing board decisions, and keeping the board informed.

## Three Legal Duties of a Board Member

### Duty of Care

You are responsible to care, to participate actively in making decisions on behalf of the organization, and to exercise your best judgement.

### Duty of Loyalty

When acting on behalf of the organization, you must set aside personal and professional interests and put the organization's needs first.

### Duty of Obedience

You are responsible for ensuring that the organization remains true to its mission, complying with its governing documents and all applicable federal and state laws.

## Specific Responsibilities

1. Determine the organization's mission and purpose.
2. Select the library director.
3. Support and evaluate the library director.
4. Ensure effective planning.
5. Monitor and strengthen programs and services.
6. Ensure adequate financial resources.
7. Protect assets and provide financial oversight.
8. Build a competent board.
9. Ensure legal and ethical integrity.
10. Enhance the organization's public standing.



## Role of the Board President

The President must find a balance between efficient decision making and allowing full discussion. The role of the President includes:

- To open the meeting and call members to order at the agreed upon time after legal public notice has been given.
- To recognize members entitled to the floor.
- To ensure that a few members do not dominate discussions. All members should have a chance to be heard.
- To state and put to vote all questions which are moved, and to announce the results of the vote.
- To enforce the observance of order and decorum among members as well as all legal requirements.
- To ensure that the library board members understand the importance of acting as a body, not as individuals.

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## Bylaws

A set of rules established by the library board that govern the board's own activities. Well crafted bylaws help provide for the smooth and effective function of a library board.

Library board bylaws must comply with all relevant statutes.

**At a minimum, bylaws should indicate:**

- The library board officers to be elected, how they are elected, and the powers and responsibilities for each officer.
- When the meetings are held and how meetings are conducted.
- What committees are appointed, how they are appointed, and what they do.
- How the bylaws are amended.

Library board bylaws should never prescribe term limits. The municipality making the appointment makes its own decisions regarding terms of their appointees.

## Best Practices for Board Meetings

### Have an Agenda

Board chair and library director should work together to create and share an agenda, along with any related information, to board members about 7 days in advance.

### Be Punctual

Start and end meetings on time.

### Make Decisions

Be sure to make decisions, not just hear updates.

### Keep A Record

Make sure someone is taking the minutes of the meeting and they are distributed as quickly as possible after the meeting to update board members who were unable to attend.

### Have Fun!

Bring food, sit in different seats, and read testimonials and thank you notes.



## Sources

[American Library Association](#)

[Boardsource.org](#)

[Iowa Library Trustee's Handbook](#)

[Trustee Essentials: A Handbook for Wisconsin Public Library Trustees](#)

[WebJunction](#)

[Wisconsin Attorney General's Open Meeting Law Compliance Guide](#)

[Wisconsin Statutes](#)

[Wisconsin Trustee Training Module: Library Board Powers and Duties](#)