

Trustee Topics: Chapter 7

The Library Board and Library Personnel

Role of Director/Role of Board

- It is the library director who hires and supervises all other library staff, but the library board has the legal responsibility for establishing the duties and compensation, as well as the personnel policies, for all library staff.
- The library director can and should recommend personnel policy changes, but can implement only policies officially approved by the board.
- The library director has the authority to hire staff to fill positions authorized by the library board and to supervise those staff, but should keep the library board informed of important personnel issues and consult with the board, if possible, before making significant personnel decisions.

Role of Director/Role of Board

- The library board's unsolicited intrusion into the director's responsibility to select and supervise staff can undermine the authority of the director and create discord and disorganization in library operations.
- While the library board has the legal responsibility for establishing staff duties and compensation, your library will run most effectively if the library board delegates to the director the responsibility for the day-to-day assignment of staff duties and supports the recommendations of the director for changes in staff compensation (within the policies established by the board).

Lines of Communication

- Trustees should direct staff members who have complaints about the director, policies, or materials to discuss the situation with their supervisor or the director. If that does not resolve the issue, the staff should be encouraged to follow the library's grievance or complaint procedure provided in the library's personnel policy. Only in extreme situations should staff complaints go directly to the board.
- Because the library board may want input from the staff on certain issues, the board should solicit such input through the director

Lines of Communication

- Except in unusual circumstances, communication between the library board and library staff about library business should be carried on through the library director. Going behind the director's back undermines the trust necessary for effective and orderly operation of the library.

Staff Compensation Levels

- The ability to attract and retain high-quality staff depends partially on competitive and fair wages and benefits for library staff. Compensation for library staff should be competitive with compensation provided by similar-sized libraries in Wisconsin and nationwide.

Personnel Policy

- It is the responsibility of the library board to approve a personnel policy for library staff that formally establishes compensation and benefit policies, rules and conditions of employment for library staff, etc.
- It is important for these policies to be gathered into a written personnel handbook available to all library staff. These written policies ensure that all staff are treated according to the same rules.

Personnel Policy

- Many state and federal laws govern the relationship between employer and employee, and it is essential that the library's personnel policy comply with these laws.
- To simplify maintenance of their personnel policies, many library boards adopt the personnel policy of their municipality as the library personnel policy, subject to those changes approved by the library board.

Personnel Policy

- The library board should also approve a salary schedule that covers all staff positions and written job descriptions that list the essential job duties of each staff position, any educational and experience requirements, the physical and mental requirements of the job, and the salary range.

Library Employee Unions

- The right to bargain collectively is guaranteed by federal and state law. The library board must not take actions that interfere with library employees' legal collective bargaining rights
- In Wisconsin, collective bargaining practices are subject to rulings of the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission (WERC). The WERC has ruled on a number of occasions that the library board (and not the municipality) is considered the "employer" of library employees for collective bargaining purposes.

Library Personnel & Board Meetings

- Wisconsin's public records law provides special rules for the handling of staff personnel records, and Wisconsin's open meetings law has special rules for library board proceedings involving collective bargaining and other personnel issues.

Continuing Education for Library Staff

- Library staff members, regardless of their level of employment, should have the opportunity to continue to expand their knowledge of library practice, communication skills, and library technology related to their job responsibilities through participation in workshops, conferences, and other continuing education activities. It is recommended that the library adequately budget for staff continuing education and professional activities, including paid work time for attendance, registration fees, and travel costs. Wisconsin library directors must participate in continuing education as required by Wisconsin librarian certification and recertification rules.

Discussion Questions

1. How can the library board help attract and retain high-quality library staff?
2. How can the library board help promote the professional growth of library staff?
3. What is the library board's role in disciplinary action concerning a library staff member?
4. How can the library board promote orderly functioning of library operations?