

CHAPTER 2

I AM ON THE BOARD! NOW WHAT?

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Congratulations! You have been appointed to your local public library board. Now what? Effective library governance is essential for fostering strong leadership and community impact.

Colorado public libraries are central hubs in their communities. They provide free and equal access to educational, informational, and recreational materials and resources in a variety of formats. It is the responsibility of a public library board of trustees to ensure that the public library's policies and budget support the mission and the community and provide access and services to all community members.

The library director brings the library vision, mission, and values to life. Where do vision, mission, and values come from? The board. A library director is the employee of the board, and it is the role of the library director to put the vision into action. Clearly defining the separation of these roles is critical for the library to be an efficiently managed community resource that uses public funds to provide high-value library services to all.

The powers and duties of public library boards of trustees are defined in the Colorado Revised Statutes under Colorado Library Laws §24-90-108 and §24-90-109. Additionally, various other laws apply to libraries, depending on the library type. For example, a municipal library may be subject to municipal laws and any governing charters. It's important to be familiar with the library type for the board you serve and the scope of the governing laws.

The following sections are intended for informational purposes and not intended as legal advice. Libraries and trustees should consult their own legal counsel for legal advice.

RELATED COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARD(S)
ADMINISTRATION & GOVERNANCE

IN THIS SECTION, WE WILL EXPLORE:

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Roles of the Board of Trustees

Trustees are responsible for providing the vision and direction of the library now and sustaining it for the future. The library director and staff are then responsible for putting that vision into action. As a trustee, you represent all members of the community. It is important to foster public trust by being effective stewards of public funds and being open and transparent in your decision-making.

Trustees have four distinct roles: Leadership, Governance, Stewardship, & Management.

LEADERSHIP

- Planning, creating the organization’s culture, setting an example, and promoting to the community.
- approving a mission-driven strategic plan and other long-range plans
- exemplifying ethical and value-driven behavior
- setting an example for the community through volunteerism and financial giving
- promoting the organization to the community

STEWARDSHIP

- Monitoring results and adjusting along the way.
- expenses and revenue concerning the budget
- progress on the annual operational and fundraising plan

GOVERNANCE

- Assuring that structures are in place for continuity in meeting the mission and delivering the strategic plan.
- bylaws
- policies of effective management and legal compliance
- committees with clear lines of authority and duties
- an annual budget, operational plan, and fundraising plan
- an annual executive director evaluation and compensation review system
- guidelines for effective board meetings

MANAGEMENT

- Making sure the board is doing its job.
- recruiting board members, selecting officers, and nominating committee members
- orienting board members and officers
- holding each other accountable for following through on board commitment

Separation of Roles: Trustee and Library Director

Notice in the Role of Boards section on the last page the use of the words planning, assuring, and monitoring. The trustee’s role is to set the direction, check the quality, and provide feedback. Who then determines the actions? It is the library director. It is very important that trustees respect this separation. As the board creates the vision, the library director puts the vision into place. The library director is the sole employee of the board. All other staff are under the direction and supervision of the library director.

Let’s consider an example: the Library Collection. Who does what when it comes to the library’s collection? What specific books should be in a library's collection? How do the library board of trustees and library director share responsibility for the library collection? Review the chart below.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES	LIBRARY DIRECTOR
Establish a policy based on the core values of librarianship and the community that identifies criteria for books in the collection, weeded from the collection, and the process for the public to request reconsideration for items in the collection.	Purchase items for the collection based upon policy criteria.
Budget funds for the development of the collection.	Establish weeding and inventory procedures.
Review reports to evaluate that policy and budget are being followed.	Conduct audits on collection to ensure it is representative of the policy.
	Purchase items within the budgeted allocation.
	Maintain accurate documentation for board reports and adjust processes as needed.

In the example above, the board provides the direction, and the director acts. What happens, then, when a member of the public recognizes you as a library trustee and comes to you asking why a particular item is or is not in the collection. The trustee’s best course of action is to recommend the individual speak with library staff. Why not answer yourself? The individual is not asking about the policy. The individual is asking about an item. If the community member wishes to discuss the policy, then speaking to the trustees is the right action.

Working together: Trustees and library director

Keeping in mind that the library director is the employee of the board of trustees, a positive working relationship is necessary. Identifying clear lines of communication and expectations between the board of trustees and the library director is appropriate. All communication with the staff should occur through the library director.

Other areas in which the board of trustees and library director should work together include:

- developing a strategic plan
- recruiting, orienting, and onboarding new trustees
- ensuring public trust through transparent communications and public reports
- meeting with elected officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders to educate on the impact and relevance of the library
- complying with federal, state, and local laws, codes, and ordinances
- tracking effectiveness of library services and collections

What Role Do Trustees have with the Friends and Foundation?

Public libraries are fortunate to have many active supporters including individuals who are part of Friends or a Foundation. While all advocate and promote awareness of the library, these entities are separate from the board of trustees. The Friends and Foundation are focused on fundraising or supplementing public funding for the library with donations. The trustees should support their efforts by attending events and championing fundraising. See Fundraising, Foundations, and Friends ([hyperlink](#)) for more information.

COMPENSATION

In the State of Colorado, a trustee cannot receive a salary or other compensation for services as a library trustee by law ([C.R.S. §24-90-108](#)). Necessary expenses incurred for things such as conference registration, travel reimbursements, and meal stipends can be paid by the library. Trustees may also obtain reimbursement for mileage incurred to attend board meetings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Colorado statutes establish a code of ethics for public officials. ([C.R.S. § 24-18-101, et seq.](#)) These laws set ethical standards on topics such as conflicts of interest, prohibitions against personal financial gain, and disclosure requirements. Library board trustees should follow these ethical standards.¹ Trustees must carry out the duties for the benefit of the community the library serves and its people, not their own self-interest.

When considering conflicts of interest and personal financial gain. The basic premise, or "sniff test" to consider is, does this decision provide a direct economic benefit to a business or other undertaking in which a trustee has a direct or substantial financial interest? A conflict of interest occurs when either a vote or an attempt to persuade others to vote occurs. This includes but is not limited to:

- disclosing or using confidential information acquired during official library duties to further one's own personal financial interest;
- accepting gifts or services for personal benefit of substantial economic benefit to influence a trustee's decision; or engaging in a business in which the trustee is a majority owner or substantial financial interest as counsel, consultant, representative, or agent.

Failure to disclose a conflict of interest can be a crime in certain situations. When a board member exercises "any substantial discretionary function in connection with a government contract, purchase, payment, or other pecuniary transaction," the board member must disclose a known potential conflicting interest 72 hours in advance of the transaction by giving written notice to the secretary of state and library governing board. [C.R.S. 18-8-308 \(1\) & \(2\)](#). Failing to disclose this type of conflict is a class 2 misdemeanor.

¹ It appears library board trustees would be subject to most of the requirements in § 24-18-101 *et seq.*, based on the definition of "local government official" in § 24-18-102(6), C.R.S. However, even if parts of these state laws don't apply to library board trustees, it would be best practice for library board trustees to adhere to these ethical standards.

[C.R.S. §18-8-308\(3\)](#). It is best practice for the individual with a conflict of interest to step out of the board meeting during the discussion and vote.

If an individual has a relationship with an entity but does not have a fiduciary conflict of interest as defined in law, it is best practice to note the relationship prior to the vote. Err on the side of caution regarding the perception or appearance of a conflict.

PUBLIC RECORD

The Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) provides that all public records are open for inspection by any person at reasonable times, unless there is a specific legal exception that permits or requires an entity to deny inspection of the records. ([C.R.S. §24-72-201 to 205.5](#)). What is a public record? The definition includes all writings, papers, photographs, and electronic mail made, maintained, or kept by any state or local government thus including public libraries. There are exceptions – some of which relate to library user records; however, as a rule, err on the side of considering all communications you make as a trustee to be potentially releasable, *including* records kept on a personally owned, private device

SURETY BONDS

Colorado statute requires libraries to obtain protection against dishonesty, theft, or fraud from trustees. These are referred to as surety bonds and fidelity bonds.

It is common for a library district to obtain and file a single blanket position schedule bond (combination surety bond and fidelity bond), identifying the required amounts for each trustee. Due to the financial stewardship placed upon the position of Treasurer, the bonded amount is greater than the rest of the trustees.

For library districts, the surety bond and fidelity bond requirements are satisfied if the district buys crime coverage ([C.R.S §24-14-102\(2\)](#)).

Officers

The board of trustees, immediately after their appointment, must elect officers. The role of officers is to ensure that the function of running the board goes smoothly.

Colorado Library Law requires boards to elect a president and secretary and other officers as deemed necessary ([C.R.S. §24-90-108\(6\)](#)). The typical board includes a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Bylaws must identify how officers are appointed or elected and the duties and roles of the officers [C.R.S. §24-90-109\(1\)\(a\)](#).

PRESIDENT

Responsibilities include:

- setting the agenda with the library director
- chairing board of trustee meetings
- appointing committees and committee members
- de facto member of all committees
- primary spokesperson for the board and
- enter legal contracts for the library

VICE PRESIDENT

It is typical to have a vice president should the president not be able to fulfill their duties.

SECRETARY

The secretary is responsible for the recording and posting of minutes of all board meetings.

TREASURER

The treasurer of the board typically leads the finance committee.

The finance committee assists the board of directors in overseeing the organization's financial health including:

- accurate financial records including bank reconciliation
- budget development
- strategic financial planning
- cash flow and investments

Bylaws

All library boards must adopt bylaws, rules, and regulations for their own guidance and policies for governance.

Per state law, [C.R.S. § 24-90-109\(1\)\(a\)](#), a board's bylaws must include:

1. Length and Number of Terms,
2. Good Cause for Removal,
3. Designation of Officers,
4. Rules and regulations for conducting a meeting,
5. Rules for public participation in meetings,
6. Procedures for amending the bylaws.

LENGTH AND NUMBER OF TERMS OF BOARD MEMBERS

Colorado Library Law does not set term limits; however, the governing authority may specify term limits in the bylaws.

Terms of trustees should be staggered to ensure experience, diversity, and fresh perspectives. A trustee is appointed for the length of term specified by the governing authority or, in the case of a library district, by the bylaws adopted by its board of trustees. Three years is a typical term length.

TRUSTEES

- represent the community
- reflect the library
- are the face of the library in the community

GOOD CAUSE FOR REMOVAL OF A TRUSTEE

State law provides that a library trustee may be removed only by a majority vote of the appointing legislative body or bodies and only upon a showing of good cause as defined in, but not limited to, the bylaws adopted by the board. [C.R.S. § 24-90-108\(5\)](#).

Bylaws must define what constitutes good cause for removal. Some examples may be:

- multi-meeting absenteeism
- not following policy
- violation of law
- no longer being a resident of the library's legal service area

There are no legal requirements for when an individual should resign from their position as long as they meet the qualifications of a trustee. A trustee should voluntarily resign if they are unable to fulfill their duties.

DESIGNATION OF OFFICERS

- Officers can be appointed by the president or elected by the full board. Bylaws must identify whether officers will be appointed or elected.
- Manner of appointment or election must also be included in the bylaws. Consider this as the process that takes place including length of term.
- Recommend including roles and responsibilities of officers.

RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CONDUCTING A MEETING

(See Chapter 3: Meeting, Committees, and More for additional information)

- Quorum attendance at meetings
- Voting
- Board's relationship to the director and staff

Rules for Public Participation in Meetings

Include rules for public comment including time limits, expectations, and when it occurs.

PROCEDURES FOR AMENDING THE BYLAWS

Bylaws must be filed with the legislative body for each participating governmental unit and the state library ([C.R.S. § 24-90-109\(1\)\(a\)](#) & [§ 24-90-105\(1\)\(m\)](#)).

Annual Report

Using data for decision making and celebration is a key premise of Colorado public libraries. Statute requires public library boards to complete an annual report at the end of each calendar year to their governing authority (board of county commissioners, town/city, or county). ([C.R.S. §24-90-109\(2\)](#)). This report highlights the library and must include:

- the condition of its trust during the year,
- the sums of money expended,
- the purposes of the expenditures,
- other statistics and information as the board of trustees deems to be of public interest.
- Libraries often wait until after the mandatory annual audit (see Budget & Finance Chapter 5) takes place to provide a verified true and accurate financial statement of the library.

Additionally, the library must also complete a report to the state library. This is referred to as the Public Library Annual Report (PLAR). This data is publicly accessible at [LRS.org](#). There are many tools available for trustees to access their own library's data as well as other libraries to act and make data-driven decisions. The Library Research Service (LRS) team is available to help trustees understand available data.

The annual report and completion of PLAR are often completed by the library director. Keep in mind, the completion is under the trustee's purview so when presenting the report, it is best practice that trustees assist the library director in presenting and be familiar with the content of the reports. This is an excellent opportunity to celebrate and educate the public on the impact and relevance of your public library.

Summary

The role of the board of trustees is to provide a public library that is an efficiently managed community resource that provides high-value library services to all through the effective stewardship of public funds. Library trustees play a crucial role in shaping the vision and governance of the library, ensuring that policies, financial stewardship, and ethical leadership guide its operations.

While trustees set strategic direction and monitor progress, the library director is responsible for executing these plans, maintaining collections, and overseeing staff. A strong and transparent working relationship between the board of trustees and the library director supports long-term success, with clear communication and defined responsibilities. Legal considerations such as conflict of interest disclosures, financial protections, and officer roles help uphold integrity and public trust.

Together, trustees and the director create a thriving library that serves the needs of the community while adhering to ethical and legal standards.

Try This: Situations

The best way to approach situations that come your way as a trustee is to practice and be prepared. Read through the scenarios on the next page and consider how you would respond based on the roles and responsibilities of a Colorado public library board trustee.

CHALLENGE TO MATERIALS

You are at the supermarket. Someone approaches you and asks you, as a library trustee, what your opinion is of keeping pornographic books in the library where children can be damaged by them. How do you respond?

PROGRAM POSSIBILITY

At the Colorado Association of Libraries Annual Conference (CALCON), you become aware of a work skills virtual reality program that allows individuals to earn pre-apprenticeship certifications in plumbing, electrical, or construction. You'd like to offer the program at your library. How do you go about this process?

STAFFING

A staff member is concerned about benefit package changes and reaches out to you to set up an appointment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

As an active and engaged trustee who cares about financial stewardship, you see an opportunity to purchase sell furniture from your store through the Friends to be used in the library. Consider how to proceed.