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CHAPTER NINE

New Trustee Orientation and Board Development

[**Disclaimer:** *The information in this handbook is not legal advice. We recommend that you consult an attorney if you have any questions about how the laws apply to your library.*]

Trustee Orientation

To carry out their duties effectively, new trustees need information about the library's services, needs, and plans. They also need some understanding of the legal responsibilities of the library board and the relationship of the board to the municipality, and to the library director and other library staff. A good orientation will provide new trustees with the answers they need to undertake their duties confidently.

The orientation program should be planned step by step by the library board, with the assistance of the library director. Orientation should start as soon as possible after the new board member is appointed or elected—before the first meeting, if possible. See the attached *Sample Trustee Orientation Outline* for ideas.

Trustee Continuing Education

Even the most knowledgeable and experienced library trustee needs continuing education to stay informed about new laws, new technologies, and new possibilities for library service. Library services and library policies must constantly change to keep pace with changing community needs, new laws, and new technologies. Library leaders, including library trustees, who stay informed on these changes will be better able to provide high-quality library service to their community.

Probably the most valuable type of continuing education experience for trustees is attendance at regional or statewide workshops or at conferences such as the annual Maine Libraries Conference or regional trustee forums. One of the most rewarding aspects of regional and statewide workshops is the opportunity to share experiences and ideas with trustees from other libraries. Information about these

forums and conferences is available at the Maine State Library website or through your State Library regional liaison.

Because trustees are busy people with many commitments, it may be difficult to find the time to participate in many workshops and conferences. Fortunately, there are many other ways to learn and stay informed. The Maine State Library provides access to many in-person and online workshops for staff and trustees to learn about a variety of library issues. These can be accessed for free via the Maine State Library Event Calendar [<https://maine-msl.libcal.com/calendar?cid=10791&t=m&d=0000-00-00&cal=10791&inc=0>] and Voluntary Public Library Certification Program www.maine.gov/msl/libs/ce/libcert.shtml. You do not have to work towards a library certificate to view any workshops of interest.

Many of these workshops don't require special access but if you have any questions, contact your regional liaison to set up access to these online workshops.

United for Libraries [www.ala.org/united/training/webinars] also offers free and fee-based training programs.

Library News and Continuing Education Opportunities

Your state library website and e-mail discussion lists are great sources of regional and statewide library news and education opportunities.

For instructions on how to subscribe to various library-related e-mail lists, go to www.maine.gov/msl/libs/listservs.htm and choose the lists you which to join. We recommend all trustees join MEINFO-L and MELIB-TRUSTEE to keep up on Maine library news and important announcements for trustees. You can also join ALA's national e-mail list for trustees at <http://lists.ala.org/www/info/trustees> and the one for Friends at <http://lists.ala.org/www/info/friends>.

Membership in the Maine Association of Nonprofits (MANP) www.nonprofitmaine.org/ provides nonprofit board members access to online educational materials as well as opportunities to attend relevant workshops on various aspects of operating nonprofit organizations. MANP also has staff who can offer advice on nonprofit legal and financial matters. MANP is an organizational membership.

Your library regional liaison is also a great source of information on how you can learn more about library and board operations and how to better advocate for your community library.

Other Continuing Education Ideas

Brief continuing education sessions can be held during library board meetings. This is a way to reach every trustee on the board and also a way to involve the board in brainstorming or problem-solving discussions on issues that may be important to the library. Short videos on library trustee topics are available at the Maine State Library website www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/trustees.htm. You can also ask your regional liaison about videos offered through the state library's Niche Academy.

The chapters that make up this handbook (https://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/trustee_handbook.shtml) can be used for short continuing education sessions held during regular or special board meetings. The meeting agenda should alert board members that a particular chapter will be reviewed at the next board meeting. Each board member should read the chapter in advance of the meeting and bring to the meeting any questions or thoughts concerning the issues raised by the chapter. Perhaps a board member with experience on the topic to be covered, the library director, or the library regional liaison or a library development specialist from the Maine State Library could lead the discussion.

Keep in mind that the Maine State Library offers professional consulting services to library staff and boards. These consultants are knowledgeable specialists concerning a wide range of library practices and issues, as well as new laws and new technologies that may be of interest to your library. Consider inviting a library development specialist or other expert to lead a continuing education session at a regular or special board meeting.

Budgeting for Trustee Continuing Education

The annual library budget should include funding for trustee continuing education. Funding should be provided to pay the expenses for trustees to attend library regional workshops and send at least one trustee per year to the annual Maine Libraries Conference. Funding should also be considered for at least one trustee's membership in the national association United for Libraries.

Sample Trustee Orientation Outline

Your library's orientation program can generally follow these steps:

1. The board president (or library director or other board designee) should contact the new trustee to welcome them to the board and schedule the orientation session or sessions.
2. Immediately send the new trustee a packet that includes:
 - a copy of this handbook
 - a copy of meeting ground rules
 - bylaws of the board
 - a list of board members, indicating terms of office and board officers
 - board committee membership lists
 - calendar of upcoming meetings

At a later point, you may also wish to share the following information with the new trustee:

- the library's latest annual report
- the library's long-range/strategic plan and current technology plan (if any)
- the library's policies
- the library's current and previous year's budget
- the board's meeting minutes for the previous six months
- the director's reports for the previous six months
- the latest monthly statistical report and financial report
- an organizational chart of the library staff with names and titles
- the library board's annual calendar, including legal requirements and deadlines
- Maine Revised Statutes Title 27
- copy of the Maine Library Commission's Standards for Public Libraries
- copy of a brochure or other information about Maine's Regional Library System and Maine State Library

3. The orientation should include a tour of the library, with the director, to introduce staff and discuss library programs and services.
4. The orientation should include meetings with the library director (and perhaps a library board representative) to discuss library services, library plans, and other important issues.

A possible plan for the remainder of the orientation program could be as follows:

- a. A meeting/discussion with the library director to learn:
 - how the library is organized and governed
 - how the library is funded
 - how the library is operated day to day
 - how the library serves the needs of the community
 - how the library is linked to other resources, other libraries, and the library system
 - how the library could better serve the community
- b. A meeting/discussion with one or more board representatives to talk about:
 - library board statutory powers and duties (review Chapter 10: Who Runs the Library?)
 - board bylaws, organization, officers, and committees (review Chapter 6: Board Documents)
 - location, schedule, and conduct of meetings (review Chapter 7: Effective Board Meetings and Trustee Participation)
 - responsibilities and expectations of board members (review Chapter 8: The Trustee Job Description)
 - library long-range plans, and the status of activities to meet the objectives of those plans (review Chapter 13: Planning for the Library's Future)
 - recent library accomplishments
 - board relationship to the library director, the library staff, and the municipality (review Chapter 10: Who Runs the Library?)
 - conflict of interest

Board Development

In order to grow as a board member and as a as a body, it is important to first assess and understand where you are. Identifying areas for growth will help you decide which discussions and educational opportunities to focus on first.

On the following pages, several sample board assessments are offered. Feel free to use them as is, or you can adapt one or two to your board. Be honest in your assessment. If you rate “Poor” or score low in some areas, it just means you have identified a good place for goal-setting or strengthening trustee skills.

At the end of the chapter, you will also find additional resources for further board development.

Sample Board Assessment # 1

5 Excellent 4 Good 3 Ave. 2 Fair 1 Poor

| Considerations | Rank |
|--|------|
| Board has full and common understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a board | |
| Board members understand the organization's mission and its products / programs | |
| Structural pattern (board, officers, committees, executive and staff) is clear | |
| Board has clear goals and actions resulting from relevant and realistic strategic planning | |
| Board attends to policy-related decisions which effectively guide operational activities of staff | |
| Board receives regular reports on finances/budgets, products/program performance and other important matters | |
| Board helps set fundraising goals and is actively involved in fundraising (<i>nonprofit-specific</i>) | |
| Board effectively represents the organization to the community | |
| Board meetings facilitate focus and progress on important organizational matters | |
| board regularly monitors and evaluates progress toward strategic goals and product/ program performance | |
| Board regularly evaluates and develops the chief executive | |
| Board has approved comprehensive personnel policies which have been reviewed by a qualified professional | |
| Each member of the board feels involved and interested in the board's work | |
| All necessary skills, stakeholders and diversity are represented on the board | |

Please list the three to five points on which you believe the board should focus its attention in the next year. Be as specific as possible in identifying these points:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Source: Free Management Library Website

<http://managementhelp.org/boards/documents/bylaws.htm>

Sample Board Assessment # 2

Individual Trustee Report Card

1. Do you understand and respect the different roles and duties of the library director and the trustee board?
 Yes No
2. Have you attended every board meeting and assigned committee meetings since becoming a trustee?
 Every meeting Missed some Occasionally
3. Do you prepare and study the materials necessary to be a well-informed board participant?
 Always Frequently Occasionally Seldom
4. Do you regularly read at least one library periodical and consult relevant books or pamphlets?
 Yes No
5. Do you strive to be aware of the implications of local, state, and national legislation? Do you actively lobby at least on the local and state level?
 Yes No
6. How many library-oriented state and national meetings or library workshops have you attended in the past year?
 6 or more 3 or more 1 or more none
7. How many community events or meetings have you attended as a representative of the library in the last year?
 6 or more 3 or more 1 or more none
8. Do you accompany the director to budget hearings before governing officials and actively work to gain funding from a variety of sources?
 Yes No Sometimes
9. Have you visited your local library in the last month?
 Yes No
10. Have you reviewed the library's policy manual to make sure you understand the rationale for service and need for revision?
 Yes No
11. Have you reviewed the library's goals, objectives, and long-range plan in the past year?
 Yes No

12. When visiting other cities and other states, do you visit the local library?
 Yes No
13. Do you participate in evaluating the library director annually and discussing board expectations?
 Yes No
14. Have you read Maine library laws and reviewed how these laws affect your responsibilities?
 Yes No
15. Are you a current member of any professional library associations?
 Yes No

Sources of Additional Information

- Regional Library Liaison and Specialist contact information
www.maine.gov/msl/libs/districts/
- United for Libraries [Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF)]
www.ala.org/united/
- Maine Association of Nonprofits (MANP)
www.nonprofitmaine.org/
- Maine State Library, Trustees and Friends webpage
www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/trustees.htm
- Maine State Library Calendar of Events and Workshops
<https://maine-msl.libcal.com/calendar?cid=10791&t=m&d=0000-00-00&cal=10791&inc=0>
- To subscribe to the Maine Library Trustee Electronic Discussion List MELIB-Trustee@lists.maine.edu

