

Chapter 1: Becoming a Trustee

In this chapter you will learn about:

- ✓ General description of library trustees in Connecticut
- ✓ Duties and responsibilities of a trustee
- ✓ Trustees job description
- ✓ Trustee selection
- ✓ Orientation of new trustees

General Description

As a Connecticut public library trustee you are entrusted with the continued development of the public library in your community – an institution essential to both individual and community well-being. For generations, public libraries have provided free access to the knowledge, information and diversity of ideas essential to a democratic society.

In Connecticut, library boards may be either governing or advisory. Governing boards have final legal and fiscal authority of the library. In general, if your library was founded by authority of Connecticut General Statutes, sections 11-20 and 21 or is operated by a private association, you are a member of a governing board. In some cases where the library is a department of the municipality the board may be advisory. In this case the board provides input on policies and planning and often participates in the hiring of a new library director. In both cases, however, the board has an important responsibility for representing the community, insuring the quality of library service and advocacy for adequate funding.

An effective public library board of trustees consists of informed and dedicated citizens representing a cross-section of the population who govern the library for the benefit of the community. The board fulfills ethical, legal and fiduciary responsibilities by:

- Employing a qualified library director and understanding the director's roles and responsibilities
- Setting service-oriented library policies which uphold the principles of equal access to information and the free exchange of ideas
- Guiding the management and maintenance of library facilities and assets and expending financial resources judiciously
- Working to secure an appropriate funding level for facilities, technology, hours of operation, collections and staff
- Knowing and observing applicable municipal, state and federal laws and regulations
- Working with the director to develop and implement a written plan for the maintenance and improvement of library services
- Staying informed through regular continuing education

Collectively, a Board of Trustees should have:

- An interest in libraries
- Knowledge of the community served
- Business management/financial experience
- Legal knowledge
- Diversity in age, race and sex
- Varied personal backgrounds
- Advocacy skills

Duties and Responsibilities/job description

Becoming a member of the board of trustees carries with it a responsibility to oversee the legal, ethical and financial health of the public library. Although it can be exciting and fun, it is important not to lose sight of this responsibility. As with any job, it can be helpful to understand the expectations that come with your position.

Job Title: Library Board member

Accountable to: The taxpayers and the people served by the library

Responsibilities: Responsible for working with other board members to oversee the library, establishing policy and plans, determining the final budget and conducting public relations.

Duties:

- Attends and participates in all board meetings
- Reads board meeting minutes and other materials sent out before the board meeting
- Becomes informed about all phases of library operation
- Serves on committees as assigned by board chair
- Lends expertise and leadership to the board for the good of the library
- Actively participates in activities and workshops
- Helps to secure adequate municipal funding for the library
- Participates in fundraising activities
- Visits the library often

Qualifications:

- Appreciation of the library and a desire to provide the best possible library service for the community
- Willingness to be a team player
- Ability to work with people
- Ability to plan
- Ability to put aside personal preferences for the greater good of the library

Selection of Trustees

The selection of trustees, the size of the board, the terms of membership and the powers and duties of trustees depend on how your library was founded.

Many libraries in Connecticut are covered by Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Sections 11-20 and 21 (see Chapter 3). If there is nothing contradictory in the town charter these libraries' boards are elected in the manner provided in C.G.S. Section 9-207. The number of board members must be divisible by three. Libraries serving cities may also have been formed under Sections 11-32 and 33. The boards governing these libraries consist of nine members appointed by the chief elected official of such municipality with the approval of the legislative body. Not more than one member of the legislative body shall be a member of said board. Until July 2010, these two sections applied only to cities. Now the wording applies to any municipality.

In Connecticut there are many variations on the composition and appointment of library board members. Some libraries operated by associations are not governed by these statutes. Libraries should consult their particular incorporation documents, town charter, and ordinance for guidance.

The caliber of trustees aids in determining the success of the library. Be prepared to identify potential trustees who are active, informed and interested library supporters. Trustees must devote a great deal of time and express a high level of interest to fulfill their duty. Commitment is the primary qualification for those who serve on the board. Sharing the job description with potential candidates will help communicate the expectations for members. If the library board doesn't have direct control over the selection of new members it is a good idea to communicate with the person(s) with that control and let them know the abilities and qualifications that you are looking for in new trustees.

Approximately half of all public library trustees in Connecticut are elected to their position. Most of the others are appointed by municipal officials. Some are self-perpetuating. The chart below lists the variety of methods for selection of members. Libraries occasionally have trustees who are selected by a combination of methods, i.e., some appointed and some ex-officio.

Appointed	An appointed trustee is selected by a public official or group of municipal officials.
Elected	An elected trustee is selected by the registered voters of the municipality in a municipal election.
Ex-officio	An ex-officio trustee is selected by virtue of holding a specified public office or a specified political, committee, social or religious affiliation in the municipality. For example, the legal authorization for some boards of trustees may require that their membership include the principal of the local high school, a member of the Board of Selectmen, a religious leader or a member of a prominent family.
Self-perpetuating	A self-perpetuating trustee is selected by the members of the library corporation or association, usually from the corporation or association membership, but occasionally from the municipality at large.

Terms of Membership

Board members should serve staggered terms in order to provide continuity of service. If your Board is governed by C.G.S. 9-207, one third of board members are to be elected for six year terms on a staggered election cycle.

How long should a trustee serve?

No trustee should serve on the board indefinitely, no matter how dedicated and no matter how effective the trustee is. Continuity of service provides the wisdom of experience, but change provides the essential infusion of new ideas. Both are needed. It is the responsibility of board members to recruit and encourage qualified potential trustees.

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There are many ways a former trustee may continue to contribute to the library organization:

- Help raise funds
- Join a committee
- Volunteer for a short-term or long-term project
- Participate in a one-time event or project
- Provide positive public relations by continuing to be a good spokesperson and positive advocate for the library
- Offer occasional expertise in areas such as law, finance, or public relations
- Become an active member of the Friends of the Library.

Trustee Orientation

Very few new board members come to the position of trustee with the library knowledge they need to function effectively. Some specialized library knowledge is necessary to be an effective trustee. This knowledge cannot be readily acquired by the lay person who is interested in libraries but has never been directly involved in library planning. In addition, some new board members may not fully understand the roles and responsibilities of the board. New members will more quickly become effective members if they are provided the information they need to feel comfortable with the new job and begin work.

Plan a step-by-step orientation program designed jointly by the library director and the board. Let the new trustee know how the introductory activities will be handled. Responsibility for planning and implementing the orientation is shared by the board chairperson, board members, and the library director.

The specifics of orientation will obviously vary with the style of the board, its size, and the type of library system. However, the importance of a written orientation plan cannot be overemphasized.

Orientation Checklist — A New Trustee To Do List

- Tour the library and meet staff members
- Become informed about the structure of the Board
 - ✓ Type of board: appointed, elected, or self-perpetuating; ex-officio members
 - ✓ Governance of the library: municipal, corporate, or association
 - ✓ Organization of the board, its officers and standing committees
 - ✓ Board meeting location and schedule
 - ✓ Responsibilities and expectations
 - ✓ Library and board goals and long range plans
 - ✓ Library and board accomplishments
 - ✓ Trustee roles in relationship to the library director
 - ✓ The library's relationship to the Connecticut State Library, the Association of Connecticut Library Boards, Connecticut Library Association, Connecticut Library Consortium and network consortium (if applicable)
- Meet with the library director and trustee chair to learn about the functioning of your library.
 - ✓ Organization and history
 - ✓ Funding sources and budgeting process
 - ✓ Day-to-day operations
 - ✓ Service to the community
 - ✓ Relationship to other resources and groups
 - ✓ Projects in progress
 - ✓ Volunteer resources and Friends of the Library group

Orientation Kit and Board Manual

In addition to the *Connecticut Public Library Trustee Manual*, a new trustee needs local information to review and consult. The library director should provide each trustee with a copy of the library's bylaws and any local ordinances which affect the library, its long range plan and annual updates, its policy manual, and its current budget. A list of all funding sources and the percentage of revenue which each source represents is also an important tool for the new trustees.

Contents of a Local Manual May Include:

Board

- A description of board members' responsibilities
- Descriptions of duties of officers, committees and charges
- Annual calendar with program and fiscal planning schedules
- List of board members, names, addresses and phone numbers, terms of office
- By-laws of the board, articles of incorporation if applicable
- Board minutes from previous year
- Minutes of previous board meetings
- List of suggested resources (publications and organizations)

Personnel

- Organizational chart for the library including position descriptions, pay scales, etc.
- Union contract, if applicable
- Staff list, titles, responsibilities, location
- A brief biography of the library director
- Procedures for evaluation of the library director

Policies and Planning

- History of the library and its current mission statement, goals and objectives
- Library policies on personnel, Internet access, meeting room use, etc.
- Community analyses such as census figures, economic and occupational trends
- Long-range development plans (which may already include above information)
- Most recent library annual report, with prior years for comparison

Statistical reports

Promotional materials including selected newspaper articles about the library and/or press releases, brochure

Budget and Finance

- Current budget and financial reports
- Contracts with other libraries or networks

Local Government

- Local laws, and contracts pertaining to library, town charter sections
- Local government information, for example, list of Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee members

Friends/Volunteers

- Friends of the Library history including list of board members
- Volunteer program information