

Evaluating The State of The Library: Board Effectiveness

Taking an interest in board effectiveness is every trustee’s responsibility. Your goal should be to create an environment that will produce quality services for the community coupled with a mindset of continuous improvement.

Following are tips and examples to help you assess your board. Try working through this process on your own, rating your board in each of the seven areas. Then do this exercise with your full board present and discuss the areas that may need to be improved. A conversation like this could be revealing and energizing.

1. Are you providing maximum benefit to your community?

- As a trustee, you have been entrusted to manage the resources given to the library for provision of quality library services for your community. A library can support their community in many ways. **Do the services your library provides match the needs of the various segments of your community?** For example, a library serving many commuters might opt for evening and weekend hours and audio books over other areas of service.
- **Do you have communication mechanisms in place for you community to give input?** Soliciting feedback from your community is key to finding out what they need and what services might best suit their lifestyles. Actively seeking input shows your community you care about what they want and allows you to shape library services for the maximum number of people. Obtaining input from your community can happen in a variety of ways (focus groups, informal conversations, outreach to community groups, etc.) and should happen on a consistent and regular basis.

Maximum Benefit	Indicate how close you are to providing maximum benefit to your community:					Minimum Benefit
	1	2	3	4	5	

2. Is the Library well integrated into the community?

- Providing excellent service is typical of most libraries, but many people in the community may not recognize the value you provide. The library needs to be a visible partner in community activities and organizations. Working with other organizations and being involved in community events will raise your visibility and spread the good word about your services. For example, think about how the library can connect to local businesses or schools. **What kind of presence does the library have in the local community?**
- Frequently, community leaders in a position to champion the library are unfamiliar with your services and are unaware of the value you truly bring to the community. When asked if they know what their library offers, the majority of people say “yes,” but when told what their library actually has, everyone is surprised. **The board should consider how they are communicating with community leaders and what messages about the library will connect best.**

Highly Visible	Indicate how visible your community is in the community:					Not Visible
	1	2	3	4	5	

3. Does the board consider the philosophy of public libraries in all policies, plans and decisions?

- Public libraries are one of the most democratic institutions in America. Values such as a commitment to intellectual freedom, equity of access to information, and the confidentiality of patron records are the cornerstones of the American public library. **The impact on these values should be a factor in all decisions.**

Common Understanding / Integration of Values	Indicate how well your board integrates public library values into their work:					Little Understanding / Integration of Values
	1	2	3	4	5	

4. Does the library have the capacity to carry out the mission and the plan?

- Do you have adequate personnel, materials, space, and funding to provide the services needed by the community? Has the board recognized the areas that the library is lacking in and proactively sought ways to expand capacity where needed? If your library has grown, have you considered the organizational implications of this growth?**
- “Making do” is not necessarily what your community is looking for. If you have done community analysis for your long-range planning process and heard from your community that they need something you feel you can’t provide due to lack of personnel or funding then start strategizing about how you will provide this service—either through resource reallocation, seeking additional funds or some other creative, sustainable solution.

Adequate Capacity	Indicate the capacity of your library to meet community needs:					Inadequate Capacity
	1	2	3	4	5	

5. Is the board governing or managing?

- **The board’s role is to create plans and policies, the implementation of those plans and policies is the role of the director.** When boards are too involved at the “micro” level of library activities the true work of the board-that of building a viable and sustainable library for future generations-cannot be accomplished effectively or efficiently.

Governs	Indicate your board’s tendency:					Manages
	1	2	3	4	5	

6. Are your meetings well run?

- **Is there an open atmosphere where board members feel they can freely ask questions? Do agendas, reports and documentation adequately prepare you for discussions and decision-making? In your meetings, are the above five areas referred to when discussing plans, policies and issues?**

Well Run	Indicate how well run your board meetings are:					Chaotic
	1	2	3	4	5	

7. Does the board annually review the functioning of the organization, including the above 6 questions?

- **Does the board routinely check on the progress being made on the goals and objectives laid out in the library’s long-range plan? Are quantitative and qualitative metrics in place to indicate the success or failure of a service or program currently offered?**
- By periodically checking on the library’s progress you will have the chance to make course corrections, if you ignore the progress or status of a service it is more apt to become stagnant or even irrelevant which works against getting the most out of the community’s investment in your library.

Reviewed within a year	Indicate the frequency with which the board reviews its progress:					Not reviewed this decade
	1	2	3	4	5	

Have each board member fill out the seven scales and see which areas need to be improved. A conversation like this could be revealing, energizing and perhaps help your board get the focus it needs to ensure effectiveness.

Once you have identified areas for improvement, the board and the director should regularly assess progress to make sure you are moving the organization forward to meet the needs of your communities rather than just treading water.

Source: Mid-Hudson Library System; See Also: Part 1 of Evaluating the State of the Library - Director Evaluation
[<http://midhudson.org/topics/trustees/atb-evaluating-the-library-1/>]