

Chapter 4

Policies: AN ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRUSTEES

In this chapter you will learn about:

- ✓ The benefits of library policies
- ✓ Suggested policies for your library
- ✓ Where to find sample policies
- ✓ Elements of successful policies

General Description

One of the most important responsibilities of library trustees is the development of policies by which the library director, staff and trustees can make consistent service and administrative decisions. These policies must adhere to the library's mission statement and follow local, state, and federal laws and provide fair treatment of patrons and staff. State statutes that may relate to policies may be found at: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/Statutes.asp>

Policies guide all phases of library operation, they are not detailed descriptions of procedures. Thus, a circulation policy would be a broad statement of goals and objectives for this area of library service, providing a framework on which those procedural details would be based. It is not a detailed list of steps on how to check out a book.

Chapter 4: Policies

Because policies provide framework for actions and decisions, it follows that the library's mission statement, bylaws of the board, and the long range plan are also considered policies. Libraries also are strongly encouraged to adopt these professional policies:

The Freedom to Read (from the ALA)

<http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/statementspols/ftstatement/freedomreadsstatement>

The Library Bill of Rights (from the ALA)

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

Two other federal Acts bear prudent watching and may affect the policies the Board will adopt:

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

The Patriot Act (as it relates to confidentiality of records)

Benefits of Policies

Properly developed and adopted policies:

- support the overall library plans, goals and objectives;
- guide library director and staff in implementation of board judgments;
- provide direction and consistency in day-to-day service to community and library operation;
- reduce uninformed decision making and crisis responses to problem situations; and
- protect the rights and assures fair treatment of all patrons and staff members.

Policy Development

Policies are needed by the director and staff as they carry out their jobs, and so it is these persons who usually research, develop, and draft a policy for presentation to the Board for consideration and possible adoption. The Board also may choose to write a policy or ask the director and staff to do so.

The following is a core list of policies most often needed by a library. Rather than start from scratch it is often easier to work from policies developed by other libraries. Sample policies may be found at:

<http://www.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/pages/sample-policies-connectic>

- Personnel (If not covered by town policies)
- Challenged Materials
- Circulation
- Code of Conduct
- Collection Development
- Confidentiality
- Customer Service
- Financial Development, Foundations, Investment & Endowments
- Internet/Public Access Computers
- Gifts, Memorials, and Sponsorships
- Meeting Rooms, Displays and Exhibits
- Mission Statement
- Volunteers

To be legally valid, a policy must be approved by the Library Board at a properly notified public meeting within the standards of the Freedom of Information Act. The approval date and any review dates should be noted (usually at the end of the policy), and the policy should be clearly documented in the formal Board minutes.

Elements of an Effective Policy

- Supports the mission statement
- Does not conflict with bylaws or long range plan
- Adheres to local, state, federal laws
- Does not conflict with other policies
- Treats staff and patrons fairly
- Is clear and understandable
- Does not include procedures
- Provides staff and board with clear direction when making decisions

- Uses the best library practices

When the Library Board considers a policy for adoption, they should know:

- Subject of the policy
- How the policy contributes to library goals
- Need for the policy
- Who it will affect
- Who developed it
- What elements should be included
- What options are possible
- What are the legal ramifications
- What is the cost (staff time, budget, collection, facilities)
- Who should review before approval
- Who will enforce
- Who will inform and train staff
- How new hires will be informed
- Regular schedule for review

Once a policy is approved, the library director is responsible for informing the staff and the public. The approved policy is to be supported by the Board, the staff, and the Friends of the Library regardless of individual opinions.

Copies of the policy manual should be given to members of the Board, involved municipal officials, the library staff and be easily accessible to the public including through the library's web site.

Trustees should allow adequate time to consider policies before approving them. Policies also need to be reviewed, usually on a yearly basis. Researched and up to date policies will reduce trustee and staff liability as well as educate trustees and employees of the complex and varied issues within the library's concern. There also may be policies that trustees and the director will need to defend in a public forum.

Creating polices is hard work, involving research, rewriting, and time. But, that work provides the framework for all phases of the library's operations. Through well thought out polices library trustees protect that most important

aspect of our democracy, the freedom of information upon which all other freedoms depend.