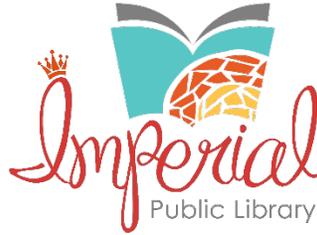


**Imperial Library Board of Trustees**

Mia Hernandez – President  
Valentina Estes – Vice President  
Magdalena Altamirano – Trustee  
Alejandra Banda – Trustee  
Ivonne Sotomavor – Trustee



**STAFF REPORT**  
**Agenda Item No. B-5**

**To:** Imperial Public Library Board of Trustees

**From:** Library Administrator, Ember Haller

**Date:** October 14, 2025

**Subject:** Library Advocacy

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**Summary/Background:**

President Hernandez will lead a discussion about an advocacy plan.

**Recommendation:**

No recommendation

# California Public Library Trustees Toolkit

## Introduction

For many Californians, the public library is a fundamental part of their existence. Along with free access to print and digital collections, it offers a civic and cultural engagement space, a place for workforce preparedness and educational pursuits, a technology hub, a safe place, and a center of community life. People turn to libraries for many reasons—to find answers to specific questions, to explore new ideas, to find out how to do something, to find a job, to get connected to community services, to connect with others, or just to enjoy themselves. California is one of the most diverse places in the world, and the needs and aspirations of its communities are many.

California's public libraries are equally diverse, ranging from libraries that are among the largest in the nation (such as the Los Angeles Public Library and the LA County Library, serving almost eight million people between them) to some of the smallest, such as Alpine County Library and Irwindale Public Library, serving less than 1500 people each. Administration and governance vary greatly for these libraries that serve many different types of communities and geographies.

In all these communities, public library boards play a pivotal role, in that they were created to represent the people in public library governance. They are central to a library's relationship with its community. When library boards are successful, libraries are successful! This toolkit is designed to provide the core information and resources needed to help California public library trustees make a difference.

This toolkit is not intended as a comprehensive guide, but as an overview of the basic information needed by trustees to be effective. This toolkit is written for the use of both governing and advisory boards, but given the many variances in California state and local library laws and governance, trustees should be aware that not all the information provided and practices described may apply to them. **The toolkit was developed as an educational tool and is not intended to replace legal advice.** We recommend that trustees consult legal counsel with questions about applying the law in their own situations.

Please note that in this publication the word "trustee" refers to public library trustees, commissioners, council members, or any other term used for a public library board member. "Library board" refers to public library boards, commissions, councils, etc. Note also that the term "jurisdiction" refers to the government to which the public library belongs (city or county).

## Principles of public library trusteeship

Practitioners around the nation have identified sets of trustee competencies and "golden rules" to foster and guide the success of public library boards. These are synthesized here into five main principles:

- 1) Trustees should understand, believe in, and commit to the educational, informational, community and economic development, and recreational roles of the public library and their mission as trustees.
- 2) Trustees should know the scope of the library board's powers and its role compared to those of the library director and friends/foundations groups.
- 3) Trustees should know the tenets, laws and rules that govern and guide the board's proceedings and conduct of business.
- 4) Trustees should understand and be prepared to carry out the duties of the library board regarding library planning, leadership, policies, and budgeting.
- 5) Trustees should recognize the importance of continuing education for the library board and participate in ongoing learning opportunities.

This toolkit will provide an overview and discussion of these principles and provide the basic practical and ideological information that California public library trustees need to be productive during their tenure in office. It offers advice, guidance, resources, and best practices and may be used as a reference for both trustees and library directors.

Public libraries are faced with a rapidly changing social, political, cultural, and technological environment. At the same time, they have never been more vital for California's communities. Trustees must be prepared to take on the exciting yet demanding role of helping to position their libraries as fundamental resources for individual and community success.

***"These days, a branch librarian might run story hour in the morning, assist with a research project at lunchtime, and in the afternoon administer life-saving medical aid to a patron who's overdosed." – From "The complicated role of the modern public library," Humanities Magazine (National Endowment for the Humanities, Fall 2019).***

### Principle 1.

***Trustees should understand, believe in, and commit to the educational, informational, community and economic development, and recreational roles of the public library and their mission as trustees.***

Public libraries have long offered free access to books and other information resources. But in today's environment they provide so much more. On a given day in a California public library, you might see children and caregivers engaging in library storytimes; summer lunch being served to school children when school lunch programs are not available; teens getting homework help and connecting with friends; students using high-speed broadband to do academic research; immigrants learning about local resources and getting language skills; the unemployed getting skills training and help in finding a job; entrepreneurs exploring how to create successful businesses; veterans connecting to benefits and places to shelter; people taking part in arts and cultural programming; the unhoused being connected to shelter and community services; and more. In a state where drought, wildfires and unpredictable weather have become the norm, many libraries also fill the critical roles of warming center, cooling center and clean air haven.

All these activities require resources, and library budgets are not unlimited. The engagement and knowledge of the library board is critical to help identify and prioritize the programs and services needed by the community, and to help manage and develop the funds and partnerships needed to fulfill them, for the continuous improvement of the public library. **This is, essentially, the central mission of the library board.**

Thus, a successful library board starts with engaged and informed trustees. At the outset, trustees should understand and believe in the various roles of the public library that they serve and embrace the opportunities and challenges those roles present. Library trustees come to their positions as community leaders with their own views on the public library and the services it should offer. Trustees should challenge their assumptions and reach out to the library director and administration; to other trustees; to neighboring libraries; and to state and national experts and resources, to learn about the public library, what it does, and what it can be and do, recognizing the very real resources that it takes to provide library services.

The library director and fellow trustees are the first and richest sources of information that a library trustee should consult. Trustees should ensure that they are connecting with the director and the others on the board, and that they are familiar with the library's current mission, vision, and strategic plan. Trustees must visit and use the library; attend programs; and connect with the staff and the community.

A trustee should be prepared to commit the time and effort needed to engage fully in the board process (prepare for, attend, and contribute to all board meetings; serve on committees; communicate with stakeholders). Being a trustee means holding a position in public trust; the people that trustees represent deserve the best job they can do. Trustees who are not able to offer that should let someone else have their position at the table.

There are many resources that library trustees may consult to learn more about the role of today's public libraries and about trusteeship. A recent influential work by library thought leader and scholar R. David Lankes, [\*Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today's Complex World\*](#), was written for people who support and oversee libraries, such as library trustees. It focuses on the library's role in the community it serves and provides an aspirational description of what the library can be and how it can get there.

Major organizations that offer resources to support California public libraries and trustees include (but are not limited to):

- The [American Library Association](#) (ALA) (the major national organization for libraries)
- [United for Libraries](#) (an ALA division created for library trustees, friends and foundations, and a respected national source of information and resources)
- The [California Library Association](#) (California's statewide library association)
- The [California State Library](#) offers many services and funding opportunities for public libraries.

These organizations and others are referred to throughout this toolkit. Consult the [Trustee Resource Guide](#) for more comprehensive information.

#### Ask yourself (Principle 1):

1. What is the central mission of the library board?
2. Name at least three reasons why legislators and residents should support your public library.
3. What can trustees consult regularly to keep informed about library issues?
4. What resources would you recommend to a new trustee, or someone interested in becoming a new trustee, to learn more about the public library?
5. How can you stay aware of city, county, and state news and issues, to see how they relate to the library?
6. Can you tell at least one story about how your public library has changed the lives of its users for the better?

#### Principle 2.

***Trustees should know the scope of their library board’s powers and its role compared to those of the library director and library friends/foundation groups.***

To be effective, trustees must understand the scope of their board’s powers. Without this understanding, trustees may end up misusing their time working on issues over which they have no real control.

#### Online sources for California state & local library laws

- [California Legislative Information \(Leginfo\)—California Constitution and Codes](#)
- [California Library Laws \(California State Library\)](#)
- [Municode California](#)
- [Local Codes and Charters \(U.C. Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies Library\)](#)
- [California Resources—Local Governments \(Georgetown University Law Library\)](#)

A public library’s legal authority, along with its local historical and political circumstances, shapes who controls the library and makes decisions about its activities, what revenues will support library services and facilities and how library funds will be spent.

In California, public libraries are the responsibility of local government. Localities are not required to form public libraries, but there are a number of state laws and constitutional provisions under which they may do so. These laws outline discrete types of governance, funding, and service areas, and are generally permissive rather than proscriptive in nature (though state laws regarding trustee powers are more defined in the case of special district and county law libraries). **This means that public library laws, including those about library boards, vary significantly throughout the state, depending on the type of public library and local ordinances.**

It is recognized that there are two main types of library boards: ***governing*** and ***advisory***. All California public libraries report to a governing body. Depending on the laws under which the

library was established, sometimes the governing authority is the county board of supervisors or city council, and sometimes there is a specific library governing board. In most cases, where the county or city governs the library, there is an elected or appointed library advisory board. Many libraries with a library governing board also have a community advisory board that provides input and assistance for library governance and operations. County libraries which serve several cities may have multiple community advisory boards.

A **governing** board is either elected by the general population or appointed by the jurisdictional government. An **advisory** board may be appointed or elected. The main difference between them is that a governing board always has the legal responsibility for hiring and evaluating the library director and for the library's finances, while an advisory board does not.

Additional duties for governing boards include determining the mission, vision, and strategic plan for the library; setting the policies governing the library; and providing general administrative oversight (board responsibilities will be covered in depth later). However, in many cases some or most of these functions may be handled by an advisory board, as the power and authority of a California library advisory board may fall anywhere along a continuum from advisory to all-but-governing in nature.

Trustees must understand where their board's authority lies on that continuum. The board's powers are largely determined by local law and by the understanding established over time between the board and the local jurisdiction. For a full picture of the legal basis of their powers, trustees should consult their local ordinances, bylaws, and their board's legal counsel.

**In California, there are five types of public libraries, as follows:**

- **County libraries.** County libraries are organized under the County Free Library Law (Education Code §19100-19180). The County Service Area Law (Government Code §25210-25217.4) allows for the creation of a separate legal entity for library services, but in practice this law is used to create a separate funding mechanism for unincorporated areas within an existing county library system.
- **City libraries.** City libraries are organized under the Municipal Library Law (Education Code §18900-18965), or for charter cities, under the constitutional "home rule doctrine" (California Constitution Article XI, §3), pursuant to a charter adopted by the city's voters.
- **Independent special district libraries.** Independent special district libraries may be organized under one of the following laws: The Library District Law (Education Code §19400-19532); The Library and Museum District Law (for unincorporated towns and villages; Education Code §19600-19734); Unified School Districts/Union High School Districts Public Libraries Law (Education Code §18300-18571); and the Community Services District (CSD) Law (Government Code §61000-61250).
- **Joint powers of authority (JPA) libraries.** JPA libraries operate by agreement between the governing boards of two or more governmental entities, pursuant to the Joint Exercise of Powers Act (Government Code §6500-6599.3). A member of a JPA may also be organized separately as a county, city, or independent special district library.

- **County law libraries** were legally designated as public libraries by the state of California in 2015 (Education Code §19307). These libraries are formed under the County Law Library Law (Business and Professions Code §6300-6363).

The table below shows the types of public libraries in California, the state laws under which they are formed, and typical characteristics of the library board as outlined in state law. Note that there are local variances; for example, the law permits cities and counties to contract with each other for library services, thus a “city library” may serve the whole county.

Library type	Formed under which state law or constitutional provision	Type of library board in state law	Number of board members constitution of board	Powers outlined in state law
County library	County Free Library Act (Education Code §19100-19180)	Advisory (county board of supervisors governs)	Varies by local law, usually includes representation from all local communities or county districts	Varies by local law
City library	Municipal Library Law (Education Code §18900-18965)	Governing, but varies by local law*	5 (may include additional ex-officio/non-voting members)	Education Code §18910-18927
City library	City charter formed under the “home rule” doctrine (Constitution Article XI, §3)	Varies by charter provisions	Varies by charter provisions	No provision in state law
Special district library	Library District Law (Education Code §19400-19532)	Governing	Either 3 or 5, depending on the original petition establishing the district (see Education Code §19402)	Education Code §19460-19483
Special district library	Library and Museum District Law (Education Code §19600-19734)	Governing	5 (Education Code §19611)	Education Code §19640-19664
Independent special district library	Unified School Districts/Union High School Districts Public Libraries Law (Education Code §18300-18571)	Governing (if commission established, if not district board governs)	District board may establish a library commission consisting of 5 members (Education Code §18440)	Education Code §18400-18411
Independent special district library	Community Services District Law (Government Code §61000-61250)	Governing	Either 3 or 5, depending on the original petition establishing the district (Education Code §19402 or Education Code §19611).	Government Code §61100(k) (powers same as in library district laws)
Joint powers of authority (JPA) library	Government Code §6500-6599.3	Governing (dependent on JPA contract)	Dependent on JPA contract	Dependent on JPA contract
County law libraries	Business and Professions (BPC) Code §6300-6363	Governing	3-7 depending on number of county superior court judges (membership specifically spelled out in BPC §6301-6301.5)	Business & Professions Code §6340-6350

\* The Municipal Library Law designates the library board as governing, but a city council may appoint its own members as the library board and create an advisory board to help govern the library system.

California public library trustees serve as unpaid volunteers, though they are typically compensated for travel and continuing education expenses. The Municipal Library Law allows for compensation of trustees (limited to \$50 per month), but this practice is not followed.

***The role of the board vs. the role of the library director.*** All library boards should understand their role in respect to that of the library director. Though governing boards generally have more direct oversight over library operations than advisory boards, all have a duty to work cooperatively with library management and respect and support the director's role.

Library boards are charged with fiduciary and administrative oversight and establishing policy and long-term plans for the library (or advising on these to the governing body). The board hires (or may advise on the hire of) the library director, **but the director has the delegated responsibility for managing the library and its daily operations.** It is the director's responsibility, not the board's, to employ and supervise the library staff, manage the library collection, implement programming, supervise day-to-day operations, apply policies, and oversee procedures. The board's role, and that of the director, are obviously intertwined, but the board should abide by the following "golden guidelines" in dealing with the library director and library staff (adapted from the Washington State library trustees wiki):

- Boards should not try to run or manage their libraries; they should provide oversight (or advice, in the case of advisory boards). Micromanaging is a temptation board members must avoid.
- Individual board members have no authority; authority lies with the board as a whole.
- Boards should always support the library director and library staff in public.
- Boards should not disregard advice or suggestions from the library director out of hand.
- Boards should never serve as a communication link between the staff and the director; the community and the staff; the jurisdictional government and the library. These are all the responsibility of the library director.
- The board should not try to dominate the director; the director should not try to dominate the board. Neither should try to undermine the other. It is not a competition. Both parties should remember their ultimate purpose - to serve the needs of their community.

***"The partnership between board and director works best when their separate roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and mutually respected." In "When Small is All," American Libraries Magazine, December 2010.***

The role of the library board vs. the role of the library friends, foundation, or similar support groups. Public library friends groups are independent organizations created to support the work of the library and board of trustees, not to engage in that work or take on those responsibilities. These groups focus on fundraising, advocacy, and volunteer work. Library friends groups should have a separate and distinct corporate existence, with separate federal tax exemption and funding. Depending on local needs, library friends may, for example:

- Create public support and awareness for the library and its programs

- Raise funds to support items not in the library budget
- Work for library legislation or increased appropriations
- Sponsor and support library programs and events
- Volunteer to work in the library, or on library-related projects

While a friends group may handle incidental fundraising, foundations are usually established when there is a need to solicit major contributions for capital projects or large-scale programs that support the library’s mission and vision, cooperating rather than competing with library priorities. Foundations tend to be more complex in their legal organization due to tax laws and regulations.

Trustees should work cooperatively with friends groups and foundations, ensuring that their supportive role is understood and appreciated. The board may consider including representatives from library friends/foundation groups and having those groups report or present at board meetings. [United for Libraries](#) and others provide some excellent advice for working with friends, see the [Resource Guide](#).

#### Ask yourself (Principle 2):

1. What type of public library do I serve? Under which state law was it formed, and what are the local laws? Why do these
2. On which type of library board do I serve (governing or advisory)? What are the primary differences between these types?
3. What is the most important thing for trustees to remember in working with the library director?
4. What is the primary role of a library friends or foundation group? How does it compare to the role of my library board?

#### Principle 3.

***Trustees should know the tenets, laws and rules that govern and guide the board’s proceedings and conduct of business.***

As stated earlier, the library board’s authority comes from the board acting as a whole; individual members have no authority. The board must function well as a team to exercise its powers successfully. Every effective team abides by principles and rules put in place to guide its conduct of business. It is important that trustees know what these rules are, and what provisions might be put in place, to facilitate the work of the board and ensure that it is following federal, state, and local laws and ethical practices for trustee conduct.

#### Bylaws.

Most library boards have adopted bylaws that provide the framework for their proceedings. These bylaws must be consistent with local and state laws. Bylaws are a mechanism for library boards to establish rules and routines that govern their actions. At a minimum they should include:

- The library board officers to be elected, methods of election, length of their terms and the powers and responsibilities of each officer
- When meetings are held, and how meetings are conducted
- Definition of a quorum and attendance requirements
- The standing committees to be appointed, method of appointment, and what they do
- Provision for amending bylaws
- Provision for term limits
- Provision for calling special meetings
- Provision for removing a board member with reasonable cause and appointing new members
- Provision for reviewing bylaws at least every three years

As bylaws are fundamental to effective library board operations, boards must be careful when amending existing bylaws or developing new ones. Bylaw language should be clear and unambiguous. Reviewing bylaws adopted by other similar boards can be helpful. See the [Resource Guide](#) for sample bylaws and further guidance.

A well-balanced board:

- Rapport with the whole community
- Occupational diversity
- Political acumen and influence
- Business/financial experience
- Legal knowledge
- Diversity
- Varied personal backgrounds

Trustees should understand the roles, assignments and the expectations for officers, committees, and individual trustees that are outlined in their board's bylaws. This goes doubly when it comes to the recruitment of new trustees. Each trustee brings certain strengths, skills, talents, and experience to the table. Vacancies on the board should be rotated and the board should work to recruit members who represent a broad spectrum of community interests, occupations, and geographic areas, to help ensure the library will serve the total community.

Given the reality that boards are appointed or elected by a number of people and politics may be involved, the board should endeavor to see that it is widely recognized that the board should be competency-based. Candidates for library trustee positions should be given a written statement of the duties and responsibilities of membership on the library board, and these statements should also be made available to those who elect/appoint trustees.

#### **Effective meetings.**

Effective meetings start with an agenda and related packet of background materials, distributed to the board well before the meeting (at least one week ahead is the recommendation from [United for Libraries](#)). Agenda development works best as a collaboration between the board president and the library director, as the director knows best about the current hot issues.

Agenda items are often designated as either “discussion” items” (those requiring discussion from the board) and “consent” items (those items that are routine, procedural, informational, non-controversial).

“A good agenda is the best tool you have for ensuring that a meeting goes smoothly, that all issues of importance are adequately addressed, and that everyone has an opportunity to contribute thoughts and ideas.” From *Effective Meetings for Library Boards of Trustees* (United for Libraries, 2012)

The board’s bylaws often will specify the order of business on the agenda. To comply with the Brown Act (this will be discussed later), agendas must include an item for public comment. Boards often include information on the agenda about how public comment is conducted, so that members of the public can be prepared. This information may be included in Spanish and/or other languages, to accommodate community needs.

To move the meeting along, it’s helpful to allot specific times for each item, and to specify which items need discussion or action. Besides standard agenda items such as welcome and introductions and approval of minutes, library board agendas often include a director’s report, friends/foundation reports, budget review or planning, library policy discussion, and an item for board education. Many boards find an agenda building item added toward the end of the meeting to be helpful in trustee engagement.

Putting together and distributing the agenda packet usually rests with the library director and staff, though this is not always the case, especially in larger institutions. The packet normally includes the agenda as the first item, the minutes of the previous meeting, and any written reports, statistics, or other background material for the action items on the agenda, including new or changed policies or spending proposals. The [Resource Guide](#) includes agenda and board packet examples and further guidelines for effective meetings.

The board should have a yearly business calendar that notes board meeting dates and holidays and also at what point in the year regular business items such as director performance appraisals or library budget review, discussions and decisions should take place.

*“The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.”—Ralph M. Brown Act*

### **Sunshine laws.**

California has specific open meeting and records laws which apply to local boards and commissions, including library trustees. These include the Brown Act (open meetings law, Government Code §54950-54963) and the California Public Records Act (Government Code §6250-6276.48). For the Brown Act, the general rule is that legislative bodies of local agencies (including elected or appointed boards and commissions) must hold their meetings open to the public and may exclude them only if they identify a specific statutory exemption and meet

other procedural requirements. The law also specifies how and when public notice of meetings must be given, and what procedures must be followed regarding meetings by teleconference, etc.

All trustees should be familiar with the provisions of the Brown Act. Of special note: 1) during meetings, the board may not act on or discuss any item that does not appear on the posted agenda; and 2) if an agenda item is discussed amongst board members prior to the official meeting, it could be considered a Brown Act violation if a quorum of the board is involved, either together or serially.

The Brown Act allows for closed session (non-public) discussion during board meetings of confidential subjects, such as personnel evaluation or pending litigation, if these subjects are properly noticed on the agenda. See the [Resource Guide](#) for further information. Boards are advised to seek legal counsel for guidance if questions about Brown Act compliance arise.

Under the California Public Records Act, the public has a right to obtain copies of the minutes of open meetings, and to inspect any writing or document distributed to members during a meeting. The board is not required to make audio or video recordings of its meetings, but if it does, those meetings are also records that must be made available to the public. The public is not, however, entitled to the minutes or recordings of closed sessions, unless it can be proved that the session was held in violation of open meetings laws or that the discussion during the session strayed from the topics listed in the agenda.

Library board members are required by state law to avoid any economic conflicts of interest and to submit statements of economic interest to the California Fair Political Practices Commission on a yearly basis. There are other ethics laws that trustees should follow. The Fair Political Practices Commission offers [free online ethics training](#) for local officials which can help ensure that your board complies with legal requirements. The California State Association of Counties offers [free and low-cost training and resources on state ethics and sunshine laws](#).

Governing board trustees, as they have direct responsibility for hiring and disciplining the library director, should receive sexual harassment training as [mandated by law](#) for California supervisors (two hours every two years) and the board should have a sexual harassment prevention policy. The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing offers [free sexual harassment training](#) that satisfies the state's legal requirements.

Trustees may be required to take this training in the course of their regular employment or as members of other boards. In this case, they should supply the board with certificates of training completion.

#### **Federal laws.**

Library boards must also avoid taking actions that violate rights guaranteed by the federal constitution or federal law. Many federal laws affect public libraries (see [Resource Guide](#)). In particular the board should seek legal advice before taking actions that may involve federal discrimination laws, employment laws, and intellectual freedom rights guaranteed by the First

and Fourth Amendments. The board should be generally aware of these laws and exercise caution.

#### Board liability.

Depending on the type of board (governing or advisory) and its legal and implied powers, a given board may have lesser or greater exposure to liability. California Government Code [§814-827](#) covers the liability of public agencies and officials. In California the doctrine of sovereign immunity applies except as otherwise provided by statute, meaning that public library boards and trustees are generally not subject to liability related to the performance of their official duties. But trustee and/or board liability is still possible for intentional or careless injuries or damages, illegal use of public funds or authority, ethics and conflict-of-interest law violations, California Public Records and Brown Act infractions, and failure to comply with federal discrimination, employment, and intellectual freedom laws.

Trustees can greatly reduce the possibility of liability as follows:

- Learn about the various laws that may apply to library board actions and library operations. Complete any required training.
- Vote against any proposed board action that you believe is illegal or improper.
- Vote to table an issue if you believe insufficient information has been provided on which to form an opinion.
- Act and speak for the library only when authorized to do so by the full board.
- Avoid even the appearance of conflict of interest.
- Consult legal counsel with concerns about any action (or failure to take an action).
- If you suspect conflict of interest on the board, submit a written protest to the board president.

The board should make certain that it is protected by liability insurance (boards are usually covered by the library's insurance).

#### Library values.

Library boards should endorse and adhere to the national library values regarding intellectual freedom, diversity and inclusion, and confidentiality and privacy expressed by the American Library Association (ALA). These are summarized in the [Library Bill of Rights](#). ALA has also issued [official interpretations of these rights](#) that guide the application of these principles to specific library practices in areas such as access to digital resources, services for minors and LBGQTQIA communities, economic barriers to information access, and lifelong learning.

Additional values statements issued by ALA regarding intellectual freedom include the [Freedom to Read](#) and the [Freedom to View](#). Public libraries are often on the front lines protecting First and Fourth Amendment rights. Private groups and even public authorities may work to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content, to label “controversial” views, to distribute lists of “objectionable” books or authors, to purge libraries, and to divulge user information. These actions threaten our national and state tradition of free expression. An essential mission for public libraries has always been education, the communication and

dissemination of ideas. As representatives of the public interest, trustees should recognize there is no place for censorship in a free society.

**Library Bill of Rights.** The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.
- VII. All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.

Finally, library boards should embrace guidelines and best practices for trustee professional and ethical conduct (from [United for Libraries](#)):

- Trustees shall respect the opinions of their colleagues and not be critical or disrespectful when they disagree or oppose a viewpoint different than their own.
- Trustees shall comply with all the laws, rules and regulations that apply to them and to their library.
- Trustees, in fulfilling their responsibilities, shall not be swayed by partisan interests, public pressure or fear of criticism.
- Trustees shall not engage in discrimination of any kind and shall uphold library patrons' rights to privacy in the use of library resources.
- Trustees must distinguish clearly in their actions and statements between their personal philosophies and attitudes and those of the library, acknowledging and supporting the formal position of the Board even if they disagree.
- Trustees must respect the confidential nature of library business and not disclose such information to anyone.

### **Working professionally:**

- Listen more than you speak and respect the advice and opinions of other trustees
- Support the board's decisions in public, even if you don't personally agree
- Support decisions made before you came to the board
- Respect the confidentiality of closed board sessions
- Attend all meetings
- Complete assigned work
- Trustees must also be aware of and in compliance with sunshine laws
- Trustees must avoid situations in which personal interests might be served or financial benefits gained from their position or access to privileged library information, for either themselves or others.
- Trustees shall immediately disqualify themselves when a conflict of interest exists (or the appearance of).
- Trustees shall not use their position to gain unwarranted privileges or advantages for themselves or others from the library or from those who do business with the library.
- Trustees shall not interfere with the management responsibilities of the director or the supervision of library staff.
- Trustees shall support the efforts of librarians in resisting censorship of library materials by groups or individuals.

Boards should formally adopt these principles into an ethics policy and include them in an oath of office for new trustees.

### **Ask yourself (Principle 3):**

- What is the general rule for open meetings in California?
- Have you taken any training on California ethics laws? On sexual harassment?
- What tools can you use to learn about how your board should work?
- Why is it important to prepare for board meetings?
- What should be considered when recruiting new trustees?
- What is the Library Bill of Rights? Why is it important?
- Name at least three best practices for trustee professional conduct. How does your board deal with unprofessional conduct?

### **Principle 4.**

***Trustees should understand and collaborate to carry out the responsibilities of the library board regarding planning, leadership, policy, and budgeting.***

Public library boards share a duty to represent the people and to collaborate to deliver the best possible library services for their communities. Board responsibilities vary by jurisdiction, but their common duties relate to library planning, leadership, policy, and budgeting. The following are the main responsibilities of the library board:

- a. To learn the needs, aspirations, and strengths of the community that the library serves and use this information to evaluate and plan library services
- b. To hire and evaluate the library director (or assist in the process)
- c. To develop and adopt policies (or make recommendations to the governing board)
- d. To approve/monitor the library budget and finances (or assist in the process)

***“Yes, great libraries require financial support, but even more than that they require open communication about your needs, your challenges, and your dreams.” R. David Lankes, Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today’s Complex World, 2nd Edition, 2016.***

***4a. To learn the needs, aspirations, and strengths of the community that the library serves and use this information to evaluate and plan library services.***

If library services are developed and implemented without reference to what the local community needs, wants or aspires to, they will likely not succeed overall. This seems obvious but service organizations traditionally are inward-focused, looking at how they can expand and market what they have in place rather than learning about their communities and developing services based on that knowledge. The temptation that board members and library staff face is to create and lobby for services that are personally interesting or nostalgic for them. Services implemented without regard to community needs, desires, strengths, and assets run the risk of being irrelevant or even disrespectful to the community, and/or replicating what is already being done by others.

As public libraries look at pushing their boundaries to fulfill a broader mission, it is critical that they recognize that they can do this most effectively through partnerships. Partnerships require that libraries establish ties with other community organizations. **Community connection and knowledge are critical to effective library services, and this knowledge should serve as the underpinning for everything done by the library and the board.**

Recent national and state efforts to offer libraries and their boards the tools they need to understand their communities and build library services based on that understanding include:

- *Turning Outward and Harwood Public Innovation for California’s Libraries.* In 2014 the American Library Association partnered with the renowned Harwood Institute for Public Innovation to offer training and tools to strengthen libraries’ role as community leaders and change agents, using the Institute’s Turning Outward approach to community engagement. This led to statewide trainings in many states, including California, and the development of [California-specific Harwood resources](#).
- *Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries.* The Aspen Institute developed its [Dialogue on Public Libraries](#) to create a framework for libraries to connect with community stakeholders and showcase models on how community leaders can leverage libraries as platforms for building more knowledgeable, healthy and sustainable communities.

Several California libraries have held regional dialogues in partnership with the Aspen Institute, see the [Resources Guide](#) for more information.

- *Research Institute for Public Libraries (RIPL)*. [RIPL](#) is an ongoing national initiative to provide training and tools to create a culture shift in which library leaders become purposeful in gathering, analyzing, and using data for decision making, strategic planning, and demonstrating impact. RIPL trainings are periodically held in California and national webinars and workshops are available.
- *Data sources*. Sources for free demographic data for California communities include the U.S. Census, the California Department of Finance, the California Employment Development Department, and the California State Association of Counties. Commercial products used by many California public libraries include Gale Analytics and Tableau. Other data tools for library evaluation include [Edge](#) (Urban Libraries Council—California public libraries have free access through the State Library), [Project Outcome](#) (Public Library Association) and free public library data from the federal [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) and the [California State Library](#). The [State Library](#) offers support for libraries in utilizing the state data resources available to them.

More information about these sources and the others listed above is included in the [Resource Guide](#).

The library director, library staff and the board should continually work together to ensure that library services are evaluated and planned based on community needs and aspirations. Trustees must endeavor to connect with stakeholders on a regular basis, to learn about the community, to foster the relationships needed to create partnerships, and to position themselves to provide critical information about library services, address misperceptions and clarify community benefits.

Developing and maintaining relationships with a diversity of stakeholders will help trustees learn more about what library users (and potential users) need and want from their community and their library. This information will be beneficial when the board adds or updates library policies, makes decisions about library services, and plans the library's future. It will also help the community and its leaders understand what the library provides and what its possibilities are, and lay the groundwork for community partnerships.

Trustees will have many formal and informal opportunities to connect with the community: at the grocery store, at civic or social group meetings, at the farmers market, within the workplace. Trustees should be prepared to elicit information from the public and hear what people have to say about what kind of community they want to live in, about their needs and aspirations, and about the library and its services.

The knowledge gained from community connection should be incorporated into creating or updating the library's formal strategic plan. A strategic plan, including a vision and mission, creates a map for the library's journey rather than a rigid policy, identifying where to invest resources for maximum community benefit and impact. By an intensive effort to determine the specific needs, wants and strengths of the community during a formal strategic planning process, the library and the board can create a plan for tailored services and programs to best

fulfill those needs. Strategic planning will help identify the library's strengths and untapped opportunities, and ways to capitalize on existing community assets through partnership.

There are many ways to approach creating/updating a strategic plan. United for Libraries has created a [practical guide](#) for strategic planning. Many public libraries and library boards opt to use a consultant for strategic planning processes. The board can consult with neighboring libraries for recommendations through their [cooperative library system](#), or through listservs or consultant directories. More guides and other tools for library evaluation and planning are available through the [Resource Guide](#).

#### Ask yourself (Principle 4a):

- What should serve as the foundation for everything done by the library and the board? Why?
- What can you do to gather knowledge about your community?
- Does your library have a strategic plan? If so, what are its goals? What is your library's mission and vision?

#### ***4b. To hire and evaluate the library director (or assist in the process).***

##### **Hiring the library director.**

Library boards must make sure the library operates well and in the best interest of those the library serves. The board must work to hire a qualified director to manage the day-to-day operations of the library. Selecting a competent library director is the single most important act undertaken by the board, as the director makes decisions that significantly impact the quality of library services and the library's financial future. The board is charged with selecting the best person possible to make those decisions or, in the case of advisory boards, assisting the governing body to do so.

In California, board responsibility for selecting a library director varies. Special library district governing boards have the power to act unilaterally in selecting the library director. Charter city governing boards have authority to appoint the library director. In most smaller city libraries operating under the general law, the library director serves at the pleasure of the city council or city manager. County librarians are appointed by the county administrator or board of supervisors. Depending on local practice, advisory boards may participate in the selection of the library director, and their involvement is important, as they are in a position to contribute a deeper knowledge of the library and the community.

The process of hiring a director is a joint venture with local governmental officials and human resources departments. Trustees should be aware of applicable laws and regulations and competitive salaries and benefits. The board should work closely with local government to assure effective communication and compliance with local hiring rules and regulations. The board should clarify, with local governmental officials and staff, the appropriate roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority for the recruitment, hiring process, timetable, and salary.

There are many authoritative, comprehensive resources available related to hiring a library director. The following is a general overview of the process:

- Appoint a search committee to develop the recruitment package. This could include developing or revising the job description, considering how best to promote the recruitment, and determining the strengths, qualities, and attributes of the idea direct. Conduct an exit interview with the outgoing director. What expertise is needed to fulfill the library's mission, vision, and strategic plan?  
(Note: many organizations use recruiters to facilitate the search process, and this is something that the board may consider. The board may consult with other libraries through their [cooperative library system](#) for recommendations on recruiters, if needed).
- In the case where the library director is a city or county employee, it will be up to that government to advertise formally for the position, but the board can make the vacancy known and encourage applicants. The position should at a minimum be posted on the [listserv](#) managed by the California Library Association and other free or low-cost resources for advertising library director positions both within California and nationally. Announcements should include the job title, duties, qualifications, salary, application timeline, highlights about the community and a contact person.
- Agree in advance on the methods for screening, ranking, requesting references, and evaluating applicants. The board or board committee then checks applicant references, evaluates qualifications, and arranges interviews with promising candidates, again considering the qualities needed to fulfill the library's mission, vision, and strategic plan. A uniform list of questions should be developed for both the interviews and for contacting references. These questions should be reviewed by someone knowledgeable about employment and discrimination law.
- Once candidates have been selected for interviewing, prepare for interviews. Consider sending background information on the library and community to the final candidates, to include the library strategic plan, policy manual, and budgets for the last several years.
- Follow the list of questions created earlier with opportunities for additional questions as conversation dictates. Be careful, however, to follow the rules and procedures for interviews established by the local government, to avoid any issues with discrimination. The interview is a mutual evaluation process. The search committee/board should share with all candidates the negative, as well as the positive, aspects of the position.
- After completing the interviews, the board or committee meets to review the interviews and references, discuss responses, and rank the candidates in order of preference. Once a decision is made, the successful candidate is officially notified. A written notice that includes agreed-upon title, salary, employment conditions and deadlines is very important. The candidate should also reply in writing. Once the chosen candidate has accepted, other candidates should be notified at once. If there is no strong candidate, recruitment should reopen.
- Introduce the new director to board members, the staff, appropriate community leaders, and government officials. Arrange news releases and consider a library open house reception. Create an onboarding package for the new director, including

background information, policies, budgets, minutes, manuals, reports, and measurable milestones for three months, six months and one year.

- Depending on local practices there may be a probationary period for the new director, generally lasting from six months to one year. Probation is usually considered an extension of the hiring process, during which an employee can be more easily released. Provisions for probationary periods are often written into collective bargaining agreements which may cover the director's position, and the board should be aware of these provisions. Again, the board should adhere to the jurisdiction's practices regarding probation.

#### **Pitfalls to avoid:**

- Hiring to the weaknesses or strengths of the former director (evaluate candidates on their own merits)
- Rushing to fill the position
- Taking the easy way out (promoting an internal candidate without a complete search process)
- Being penny-wise and pound foolish (take time in the hiring process and offer a good compensation package)
- Assuming all candidates are 100% candid (conduct thorough reference and background checks)
- Putting too much emphasis on technical abilities. A library director should be more than a good librarian. Great library directors are visionary leaders that communicate well with the board, staff, and community leaders.

In the probationary process, each measurable milestone as mentioned above should include documentation of goals met as well as adjustments and corrections if they are changed. To ensure that the new director is performing as expected, agendaized, closed-session reviews should be held quarterly during board meetings using appropriate Brown Act language (example: PERFORMANCE EVALUATION [Government Code Section 54957] Title: Library Director).

*Without a formal evaluation process, there is no concrete way for directors to know if they are meeting or exceeding expectations. Similarly, without the formal evaluation process, library boards may be letting troublesome issues become worse, and they also lose an important opportunity to put their appreciation of performance in writing.*

*Adapted from Short Takes for Trustees, Evaluating the Library Director, United for Libraries, 2014.*

#### **Evaluating the library director.**

A formal evaluation process provides the director with necessary feedback on job performance. It can be a tool for motivation, encouragement, coaching and direction. The process can

provide the board with valuable information about the operations and performance of the library and help establish a record of unsatisfactory performance if there is cause for discipline or termination. It can also give the board and the director an opportunity to evaluate the director's job description and adjust it if necessary.

The evaluation process should not be ignored. It protects both the director and the board in disciplinary cases. While most library director positions in California are FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act) exempt and the incumbents serve at-will, it is not advisable for the board to simply terminate a director. This is because there are many grounds for wrongful termination lawsuits, including discrimination, retaliation, or violations of specific statutes or public policies. The board must be able to document that misconduct or performance issues occurred and that the director was put on notice of them as they occurred, to help avoid later claims that the termination was motivated by discrimination or other wrongful grounds.

There are a variety of evaluation methods with a wide range of criteria (see Resources Guide). The method of evaluation chosen should reflect local circumstances. Boards should work with local officials and human resources staff to ensure that their evaluation method conforms to local practices.

A formal method usually begins with the director and the board working together to develop a list of performance criteria based on goal completion, linked to the library's strategic plan. Once criteria are set, the library director should periodically report to the board on progress toward meeting performance objectives and priorities, which may be adjusted periodically according to the library's changing situation.

#### Ask yourself (Principle 4b):

- Name some pitfalls to avoid in hiring a library director.
- What are the current goals set by your board for the library director?
- How does a formal evaluation process for the library director benefit and protect the board? The director? The library?

A formal evaluation review should be held yearly. The board may request that the library director provide an annual summary including goals, accomplishments, and challenges, as a template for the board's review. The board should reward good performance or work to correct inadequate performance.

Evaluation should be continuous. Performance problems with the director should be discussed at the time that they arise, along with possible solutions, rather than wait for the formal review.

#### ***4c. To develop and adopt policies (or make recommendations to the governing board).***

Policies are important tools used by library trustees and staff to provide effective service to the community. Policies reflect the library's philosophy of service and explain the reasons for

setting rules and limitations. A fair amount of the library board's time will be spent considering, revising, and adopting (or recommending the adoption of) library policies.

A set of well-defined, well-written, reasonable, and current policies is important to a public library, because they form the framework of the library's operation. They guide trustees and staff in carrying out their duties; help ensure quality service to meet community needs; communicate privileges and duties regarding library use to the public; help ensure fair treatment of library users and staff; and help ensure conformity to local, state, and federal laws.

Policy making is an organizational rather than a management tool, and works best with the involvement of trustees, library director and staff. The director can provide a foundation for the issue so the board can have a knowledgeable discussion. Staff can be given the responsibility to provide options, draft recommendations, and present them to the board for discussion and approval.

In creating or reviewing policies, the following questions should be considered:

- How does this policy contribute to the mission and goals of the library?
- What needs and reasons are there to change this policy or make a new one?
- What are the possible positive and negative effects?
- What are the estimated costs of implementing the policy (staff resources, building and equipment requirements)?
- How will the public perceive this policy?
- What are the legal implications of enacting and implementing the policy?
- Is the policy realistically enforceable? (If it can't be enforced, it shouldn't be put in writing.)

Ask yourself (Principle 4c):

- Why are library policies important?
- What factors should be considered in setting policies for the library?
- Who should be involved in policy development?
- When should policies be vetted by legal counsel?

Policies must be legally defensible. A legally defensible policy complies with current local, state, and federal laws; is reasonable; is clearly written and understandable; is publicly available for review and reference; is applied without discrimination; and is consistent with the library's mission, vision, and strategic plan. The most common public challenges to policies are aimed at collections and internet use but making sure that every policy is legally defensible will protect the library and jurisdiction against liability. New policies and policy changes should be vetted by legal counsel before any final board discussion and approval.

Referring to the policies of other libraries for examples can be particularly useful when developing new policies or considering policy changes.

#### **4d. To approve/monitor the library budget and finances (or assist in the process).**

In California library boards have varying responsibilities regarding the library's finances and budget. Governing boards are legally responsible for the library's budget and library financial oversight, while advisory boards do not have legal mandates for budget development or fiscal control. Depending on local practice, advisory boards do, however, often advise the library director and the governing body on budget proposals and finances.

All trustees should know where the money comes from and how much revenue can be built into the budget each year. A good understanding of revenue sources is important, as board members must encourage continued funding from those sources and identify new sources when needed.

#### **Local finances.**

Most California public libraries work on annual budgets based on city or county allocations, or property or parcel tax allocations. The county law libraries are an exception, as they are funded through a portion of civil filing fees, meaning these libraries are largely supported by civil litigants and not by state and local taxes. Library friends/foundations groups raise money for library enhancements and programs. The California State Library's publication, [California Public Library Organization](#), provides a useful overview of operational and capital funding by public library type.

#### **State level support.**

The State Library administers a number of state and federally funded [financial support programs for California public libraries](#), including funding for cooperative library systems through the California Library Services Act, funding for literacy programs through the California Library Literacy Services Program, grant programs funded by federal Library Services and Technology Act and American Rescue Plan Act monies, and state funding for special initiatives such as broadband and library construction. The State Library also manages the [California Grants Portal](#), a searchable database for competitive grant opportunities offered by California state agencies.

#### **Federal and private support.**

While the State Library manages the bulk of federal aid for libraries in California, libraries can apply directly to the federal [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) for selected grant opportunities. Additional sources for learning about federal and foundation grant funding include the comprehensive federal website [Grants.Gov](#), [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) grants, and the [Foundation Directory Online](#).

*Budgeting.* A budget is a plan for the expenditure of funds for the next year to carry out the library's operation. The amount of funds available will dictate the extent to which the library can carry out its mission.

The board is responsible for ensuring that public funds are used in the community's best interests and that the library has adequate financing for its programs and services. The budget plan should be clear, accurate, consistent, and comprehensive. Be aware that most governing bodies have policies that require that funds be held in reserve for capital replacement, to minimize adverse impacts from unanticipated expenditures, and to strengthen the financial stability of the library. This requirement must be observed as the budget is developed each year.

Depending on the type and size of the public library, its revenue streams, and local laws and practices, the board's involvement in the budget process varies from simple to complex. Here are some scenarios:

- *Scenario 1: City library (advisory board).* The city budgets on a two-year cycle but each year the board of trustees reviews the library's budget prior to its adoption by the city council. The budget is divided into program areas such as technical services, adult services, or administration. Each program area has defined objectives and associated tasks. The budget is broken down to indicate the costs for each task.

After the budget has been distributed to the city council and to city departments, a budget workshop is presented, open to staff and the public, in which the city manager reviews the critical factors that were considered as the budget was prepared. The library director, after attending the workshop, highlights the issues related to the library's current or future funding. This information is put into a "budget notebook" for the library board's review.

At the next board meeting the director reviews the budget notebook information and answers questions for the board. It is the director's responsibility to ensure the budget is adequate to meet the library's objectives. The board's role is to focus on the services offered by the library and make recommendations for changes to the city council if they feel the planned services do not meet community needs.

- *Scenario 2: Independent special district library (governing board).* A special district library begins by determining what funds are available for budgeting, by estimating its revenue for the following fiscal year and the amount of funding (if any) which will be carried over from the current year (a special district library's carryover funds remain available for its use, as they do not revert to a county or city general fund). The library director then estimates the cost of maintaining the current level of services and that of additional services and prepares a summary of the budget information for the library board. The board reviews the budget and approves or requests changes. The budget is then finalized. While there may still be a requirement for the budget to be submitted to the county board of supervisors or county manager, that body's review is typically minimal, where the library is a special district with its own governance and defined revenue.
- *Scenario 3: Joint powers agreement (JPA) library (governing board).* The budget is approved and submitted by a governing board, established under a JPA, among the

jurisdictions, possibly various cities and the county served, to operate the public library. In some JPAs the governing board has full authority in all matters of library governance, but its annual budget is subject to approval by the county board of supervisors. In others, the full authority rests with the JPA Board, which could include all members of the county board of supervisors as well as other elected officials.

The steps in the budgeting process (assuming a July-June fiscal year) might include:

- Appointing a budget-audit committee to work closely with the library director and appropriate staff. The role of the budget-audit committee is to review and critique the work done by staff, including the current year's revenues, expenditures, summary, and projections. Staff may present budget assumptions for the next fiscal year, covering possible changes in facilities, services, and staffing.
- The committee raises questions and makes suggestions to guide the library director in setting specific budget allocations.
- The budget-audit committee will review the library's preliminary budget and the full board will adopt at its regular May meeting.
- The entire board stays informed, through the library director, of the ongoing issues and reports on any significant changes that arise in revenue and expenditure projections.

The timeline for a JPA annual budget cycle might look like this:

- May -- Approve the preliminary budget to begin the fiscal year on July 1
  - September -- Approve the true-up of revenues and budget corrections, note grants received, approve new positions, and codify any needed changes
  - February – Approve any mid-year changes to ensure that the budget is on track
- Scenario 4: City library (governing board). The library board delegates the development and administration of the budget to the city librarian but determines the budget priorities for the next fiscal year. The city librarian and staff prepare the draft budget with direction from the library board, with fiscal guidelines provided by the city council and city manager. Capital and major maintenance projects have discrete timelines and preparation guidelines. The entire draft budget goes to the library board for change or approval before it is sent on to the city. Once the board approves the budget, it is sent to the city manager or finance department for approval. Any city changes to the budget must go to the library board for approval, and if the library board does not agree, they must file a variance and challenge the change at the city's budget hearings.

Budgeting guidelines for trustees (Council of State Library Agencies)

- Know who does what (board authority and responsibility in the budget planning process)
- Understand the planning context (the budget is a tool for accomplishing specific objectives that reflect the vision, mission and strategic plan of the library)
- Give the process time (allow for time to develop the budget and for consideration by the local funding authorities)

- Be realistic (understand the community climate and competing demands for funding)
- Seek additional funding if needed (grants, donations, sponsors, partnerships)
- Keep it simple and truthful (the library and its needs should be easily understood)
- Read, listen, and learn (determine what the funding agency is looking for and what impresses them)
- Present the budget (show budget base, increases and effects of decreases, state community value)

### **Budget monitoring.**

The board monitors library finances by helping develop, review, oversee and approve library expenditures to the extent allowed under its legal and implied powers, and develops and adopts (or advises on) policies for handling gifts and donations. The library director typically reports on expenditures and budget status at each board meeting.

### Ask yourself (Principle 4d):

- Where does your library’s funding come from?
- How involved should your board be in developing the budget?
- Where can you find information about grants?
- Why is the board’s active support for the budget so important?

### **Board engagement.**

The board should recognize that the library and library director need its engagement and support in budgetary matters. In California, library directors are usually government employees that report to the city or county and as such must remain neutral in budget deliberations. As trustees directly represent the people concerning library governance, they have the more tenable position to communicate with local officials on behalf of the library’s budget. Trustees can interpret the library’s plans for local leaders, explain how budget changes help the library align with community priorities, and interact to provide information about budget proposals in ways that the library director and staff cannot. Trustees have a duty to work to improve the library’s services and they are uniquely positioned to represent the library in the budget process.

### Principle 5.

***Trustees should recognize the importance of orientation and continuing education for the library board and participate in ongoing learning opportunities.***

“Trustees are at the heart of a library’s relationship with its community. They should be your most informed stewards of growth and success.” – Northeast Ohio Regional Library System

For the library board to fully accomplish its mission and responsibilities, it must have broad knowledge of, and commitment to, to the library’s mission, goals, plans and programs and the

public needs and aspirations they should address. Trustees must work to create a culture of learning for the board, to develop deeper awareness of their public library and the library world. The public library is a complex organization functioning in a complicated world. Public libraries are continually adapting and changing, and the board must do also, by learning about public libraries and about their own library and community and being open to change and to new ideas.

A first step in creating a culture of learning is to ensure that new trustees have the information they need to be successful from the start, through an effective orientation process. This orientation should ideally take place before the new trustee's first meeting and should include a packet of information with the following:

- Library mission, vision, strategic plan, budget, latest annual report if available
- Board bylaws
- Trustee job description
- Board meeting schedule and important dates
- Review of educational resources (including this guide)

The board should dedicate itself to a continuous learning process. Setting aside time for learning at board meetings can be a very effective way to accomplish this. Sessions might include a brief training video or webinar or a presentation on a new library service or new trend.

Trustees should seek out educational opportunities through their library director, and also from connection with state and national organizations such as the [California Library Association](#), the [California State Library](#), and [United for Libraries](#). Having the opportunity to network with others regionally and nationally will help trustees understand the context in which the library operates and their own roles and responsibilities.

There are many free resources available on public trusteeship and board development, as well as public library operation and management. Trustees should also ask their library director to let them know about articles or books that may be important to their understanding of the library and its social/political context. Organizations concerned with non-profit administration and management, such as [BoardSource](#) and the [National Council on Nonprofits](#), offer helpful information and resources.

The board and individual trustees should consider joining [United for Libraries](#). While some of the resources that United for Libraries offers are free, many valuable learning tools are for members only. These include [Short Takes for Trustees](#), designed for boards to use for training during meetings, and a [national online trustee discussion forum](#), which many find an invaluable resource for learning about best practices, connecting with other trustees on specific questions and issues, and for discovering new resources and learning opportunities for library trustees.

Events such as webinars, workshops, and conferences provide excellent opportunities for continuing education, both from the subject matter and from the opportunity to meet and

share experiences and ideas with other trustees. Trustees should consider attending the California Library Association's annual meeting and work to include conference programming on trusteeship. At the national level, United for Libraries offers a program track for trustees at the annual ALA Conference.

Some boards may be reluctant to approve registration fees and travel expenses for continuing education, because of financial constraints or possible public misperceptions. But these expenses are essential. The board should have a written policy on board training and budget enough funding each year to ensure that trustees can take full advantage of educational opportunities and remain aware of new trends and best practices for libraries. This is an important investment in the library's future and demonstrates good financial stewardship.

To identify where to focus its continuing education efforts, the library board should make the time to evaluate its own performance. This is an opportunity to celebrate what is going well and to look at how things could go better. Not only should the board evaluate its performance as a whole, but trustees should also evaluate themselves individually, against the duties and responsibilities covered in this guide well as against the board's bylaws, policies, and procedures. Is the board helping to move the library forward? Are board operations efficient? Is there additional education or support that will help trustees to feel confident and comfortable in their roles? The [Resource Guide](#) includes sample evaluation tools for library boards and trustees.

## Conclusion

Public libraries are essential to California's citizens. The local public library is a gateway for intellectual curiosity, learning, and self-actualization in nearly every California community. It enhances the quality of individual and community life and provides pathways to success. As one of the most credible public institutions in our country, the inclusion and engagement of the public library is critical to producing successful community solutions for local issues.

As stated in the beginning, public library boards of trustees are essential to the success of California's public libraries. They help to see that the library delivers the best library services, has a top-notch director, follows excellent policies and practices, and keeps an eye to the future. California's citizens and communities owe a debt of gratitude to those who volunteer their dedication, time, and talents to serve as library trustees. Trustees should know that they are making a real difference in their communities, and their efforts are reflected in every book that gets checked out, every program that is attended, every service the library offers, and in the support they show in the guidance of their library directors.