The Board Member's Job Description
IC 36-12-2; IC 36-12-3

The library board is responsible for the library and all that happens in it.

That may be a little blunt, but it is both a legal and practical way of looking at the job you accepted as board member. Your responsibility includes director, staff, buildings, finance, assets -- all successes and failures of the   library.

Even though the board delegates the actual day-to-day operation of the library to professional paid staff, **the board never gives up ultimate bottom-line responsibility for the success or failure of the library**. To manage that responsibility the board has five major tasks:

1) Set policies (IC 36-12-3-2)
2) Hire the director (IC 36-12-2-24)
3) Plan for the future of the library (IC 36-12-3-3 & IAC 590 Rule 6))
4) Monitor and evaluate the overall effectiveness of
    the library (IC 36-12-3-3 & 4)
5) Advocate for the library in the community and advocate
    for the community as a member of the library board.

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IC 36-12-3-2
Task 1 --
The board sets broad governance policies for the library

The board must first establish broad but clear policies about what the library will do and how it will be done. **A policy is a direction or course of action the library will follow**.

The board begins with the mission statement and writes policies that outline parameters of how the library will operate to accomplish its mission. Then the board functions as observer, interpreter and evaluator of those policies. The board also modifies existing policies and creates new policies as needed to keep the library running well.

The board's role in developing library policies is explained further in Chapter C, "The Board Develops Policy."

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IC 36-12-2-24
Task 2 --
The board hires
a director to
manage the
library

Of course, an appointed library board has neither the time nor the management skills to manage the library. (IC 36-12-2-24) That's not why board members are appointed. **Placing themselves into a governance or policy-making position overseeing a professional library director is the only efficient way for board members to make the library work.**

Although some board responsibilities cannot be delegated to others, as we'll see in other sections of this manual, a great deal of the work of the board must be delegated to the director who has the skills and abilities to do the job.

However difficult it is, the board must relinquish management authority to the paid director and then monitor and evaluate, but not interfere with that management. If the board determines major problems exist in the management, the board must resolve these with the director.

How much does the board do and how much does the board delegate to someone else to do? That's not an easy question to answer and is often a source of conflict between board members and the director. There are several ways you can deal with this confusion and keep things in perspective:

• Do <u>not</u> look at your relationship with the director as a turf battle between the board and the director. **The board, director and staff must always function as a team,** and each team member has assignments. You must determine who does what best and then allow that segment of the board team to do the job without interference from the other parts of the board team.

• The board members' duties can be defined loosely as dealing with issues that affect the whole library and its position in the community. (IC 36-12-3-3) The board sets parameters of how the   library will operate. Then the director's duty is to carry out the day-to-day functions (procedures) of running the library within the parameters (policies) set by the board. (IC 36-12-2-24(a) last sentence)

• There are few activities of the board team in which every segment of the board team isn't involved. (IC 36-12-3-12) For example, it is the board's job to establish an annual budget for the library. However, the budget is most often prepared by the director and recommended to the board for approval. So the director does have an important role in the budget process even though, strictly defined, the budget is a board responsibility.

• Communication is the best prevention of confusion and conflict. Board members and the director must feel free to discuss any issue and to express concern about who does what job.

• Board members never give up their bottom-line responsibility for the library even though they must delegate much of the work.

Examples to help you define who does what on the board team:

 • The board delegates management of the staff to the director, but the board approves staff appointments. (IC 36-12-2-24)

 • The board hires a consultant (for example, to recommend a firm to do a feasibility study), but the director seeks the bids and makes recommendations to the board for their final decision. (*Accounting & Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 10-6 et seq., IC 5-22-8*)

 • The board awards bids for major purchases, but the director recommends which bid be accepted and actually makes the purchase. (IC 5-22)

 • The board is responsible for making a long-range plan for the library, but the director will make recommendations and act as resource throughout the planning process. (IC 36-12-3-3)

 • The board approves a budgeted amount for maintenance, but the director actually determines the maintenance activities that will be carried out.

 • The board approves salary schedules and annual adjustments, but the director determines the level of staffing necessary and what those staff members will actually do. (IC 36-12-2-24(b)(1) & (2))

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IC 36-12-3-3 & 4
Task 3--
The board
plans for
the future
of the library

By delegating management responsibility to the paid staff, the board leaves itself time for the important task of planning for the future of the library. <u>Planning is not a frill, but one of the most important trusts that the community gives to the library board</u>.

Planning, in an age when dramatic change in libraries comes almost faster than we can comprehend, seems like an exercise in futility. But the very fact that change is so rapid is even more reason that every library must have a plan to cope with that rapid change and the effects that change could have on the library.

> Failure to plan is planning to fail. Board members must be visionaries for the library. They must plan as far ahead as five to ten years.

The board is generally recognized as the responsible party for long-range planning and the director is responsible for developing a short-range (1-year) plan to carry out the long-range goals set by the board. But all planning for the library is a team effort--board, director, staff.

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IC 36-12-3-3
The board
also does
short-range
planning

The director is generally responsible for writing a short-range plan that explains how director and staff will work on the board's long-range plan this year. The board's short-range plan is an outline of what the board's work will be this year. In other words, the board creates an annual calendar of board activities.

The short-range plan is a simple document that will include such things as plans for board meeting times for the year, committee activity, election of officers and board development activities.

See Chapter E for a complete discussion of the Planning Process.

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IC 36-12-3-3
Task 4--
The board
monitors and
evaluates
library
effectiveness

The very term "trustee" indicates what the community expects from you. They put their trust in you to make sure the library is operating the way it should--the way they want it to run. It's your job to keep an eye on the progress of the library for the community.

Of course, you can't watch every detail and every activity that takes place in the library, because that would be a full-time job. Board members monitor and evaluate "bottom-line" results.

For example, you cannot and should not be in the library office every day monitoring the kind of service provided by library staff. But the board can survey the community to find out the overall satisfaction of those who use the library. That's bottom-line evidence of the work staff is doing.

You will monitor and evaluate many things as a member of the library board, but there are a few major ones:
--finance
--director effectiveness
--progress towards the mission and long-range plan.

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Finance is one of the most difficult items you will have to monitor and evaluate, but it doesn't have to be an overwhelming task. You don't have to be an expert in corporate finance to do a good job of monitoring the finances of the library.

The board monitors finance

IC 36-12-3-10 though 14 and "Accounting & Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries" for specifics

• Begin your monitoring with careful attention to the budget. The budget is the board's financial plan for the library and deserves plenty of your attention. The budget will be prepared by the director and staff and presented to the board for approval.

When the budget is presented, board members must ask whatever questions necessary to gain a reasonable understanding of this financial plan-- basically, where is the money coming from and where will the money be spent.

• Monthly financial reports to the board are the windows you use to monitor how well director and staff are following the financial plan the board approved when they voted on the budget. If you don't understand the reports, ask the director for an explanation.   Remember, you don't have to know everything about the finances, just enough to feel comfortable that the money is coming in and going out according to your budget plan.

Financial reports will cover both the revenue side and the expense side of the budget.   On the expense side, you should understand what was budgeted, what has been expended to this point, the variance between the spending plan and what is actually being spent, and the reasons for the variances. It is the same for the revenue side. How much money did you anticipate at this point? What has actually come in? What's the variance? Why is there a variance?

• The final step for the board to do a complete job of monitoring the financial status of the library is an audit of the library's financial records by the State Board of Accounts. This is a required procedure for libraries receiving tax dollars, but it is much more than just a mandate.

It is also one of the board's best protections against financial misconduct or ineptness.

When the audit is completed, it will be delivered to the board president, board treasurer, and library director with the auditor's findings. Board members should feel free and, in fact, obligated to discuss the report with the State Board of Accounts and get a basic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses reported in the audit.

See Chapter H for a complete discussion of library finance.

Learning library finance takes special effort

To learn about library finance…

- New board members should insist on a good orientation about library finance and how to monitor financial status.

- The board should ask for regular board in-service sessions about library finance.

- Ask questions about finance.
  - If the budget is not clear to you, ask questions.
  - If the financial report is not clear to you, ask questions.
  - If the audit report is not clear to you, ask questions.

IC 36-12-2-24 The board monitors the Director

Director effectiveness is another very important area for board members to monitor and evaluate. Remember, you are responsible for everything in the library and you only delegate management to the director. You don't give up your responsibility when you delegate, so it's up to you to make sure that management is being handled properly.

You can't follow the director around all day to see how the job is being done, so the best way to evaluate and monitor director effectiveness is by providing a good job description for the director and then doing a formal annual evaluation to determine how well the director is filling the job description and accomplishing library goals.

The format and procedure for director evaluation must be worked out by each board, but it is important for each board member to understand what is appropriate and inappropriate for the evaluation.

Remember that you're measuring director effectiveness on bottom-line results...

-- Is there a good flow of information / recommendations from director to board?
-- Are the finances of the library reasonably stable?
-- Is the library user base growing?
-- Is the library making progress towards long-range goals?
-- Is the director working within the job description written by the board?
-- Is the community content with library services?

The director evaluation process can be carried out in many ways, but there are rules to follow in whatever process you choose.

A few good rules for director evaluation

1) Do not ask staff to evaluate the director for the board. The staff doesn't know what the board expects of the director and cannot be unbiased when evaluating their boss.

2) Evaluate objectively, based on performance, not on "gut feeling" or on your like or dislike of the director's personality.

3) Make your evaluation a positive effort to communicate better with the director, not a fault-finding mission to document errors. Formal evaluation   allows the board and the director a system to communicate about how to make the library better. Look as much for what the director does well as for what the director is doing wrong.

4) Reward good performance; demand correction for poor performance.

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The long-range plan is like a mark in the sand placed there as a reference point to determine if the library is moving ahead, standing still or falling behind. Board members must always be aware of the mission and long-range goals of the library so that you can accurately measure the progress.

IC 36-12-3-3 The board monitors progress toward goals

Progress or lack of progress will determine decisions you make as part of the board team. You can't set direction if you don't know where the library is supposed to be going.

***The board
evaluates and
monitors itself***

It's up to the library board to hold itself accountable for good performance. To do that correctly, your board should take time every year to formally self-evaluate board performance.

The purpose of the evaluation is not to find fault with board members or the full board, but to examine strengths and weaknesses. The formal self-evaluation should be followed with a plan to improve board performance.

Use the board self-evaluation form at the end of this section of the manual to evaluate your board's performance.

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***Task 5—
The board
advocates for
the library***

Because you serve as a volunteer leader of the library, you qualify as a good advocate for the organization. No matter how committed they are to the library, staff members are still the hired help.

Volunteer board members' motivation is service to the community. Board members are also community leaders and influential in the community, prime qualities for an advocate.

Your advocacy for the library will take several different forms -- establishing a relationship with lawmakers and appointing authorities, communicating to the taxpayers the needs and plans of the library and carrying out public relations activities for the library.

Your advocacy efforts will generally be part of a planned board effort. Remember, you cannot speak for the full board, but you can speak about the board's position on issues. You can also promote the interests of the library at any time.

Board members are also advocates for the community to the library. You represent community standards and interests and understand community needs. You should be ready to voice those community needs in board meetings, always being careful to represent the whole community and not just special interests.

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In addition to community influence, board members often bring personal expertise to the library board. Libraries never have enough money to hire all the expertise they need, so it's a natural for board members to offer their expertise to the library. That expertise could be anything from financial to construction, public relations to computers.

Keep in mind, however, that you are not elected to be a specialist for the library, but rather to apply your general experience and leadership skills to the governance of the library. Exercising your specialty must be done in a cautious manner.

When you offer your expertise to the board or to the director, don't be offended if your advice is not accepted. Both the board and the director must work in the context of what's best for the whole library, and not just this one area of need.

Also, when offering your expertise, be cautious not to misuse your power as a board member to pressure the director or other staff to accept your help.

"The bottom line..
A real expert knows the answers,
but also knows when to offer those answers."

The Board Evaluates Itself

Successful board teams pay attention to the process of how they operate. Just as they evaluate the progress of their library, they must also assess the operation of the board team and determine how they can do the job better.

Our board prepares to do its job by...

YES   NO   Conducting a thorough orientation for all new board members.

YES   NO   Integrating new members into the team as quickly as possible.

YES   NO   Attending board development conferences.

YES   NO   Providing monthly board development activities for all board members.

YES   NO   Performing an annual self-evaluation of board operations.

YES   NO   Providing all board members with copies of the mission statement, by laws, constitution, long-range plan, and all other important documents of the library.

YES   NO   Touring all facilities at least once a year.

Our board ensures good meetings by...

YES   NO   Limiting most meetings to two hours or less.

YES   NO   Providing a comfortable meeting room conducive to business.

YES   NO   Convening and adjourning on time.

YES   NO   Sticking to the prepared agenda.

YES   NO   Working for consensus rather than fighting for a majority.

YES   NO   Following a businesslike system of parliamentary rules.

YES   NO   Including the director as a resource for all deliberations.

YES   NO   Confining all discussion to policy issues and avoiding management issues.

YES   NO   Allowing/encouraging all board members to participate in discussion.

Individual board members...

YES   NO   Attend at least 90% of all board meetings and committee meetings to which they're assigned.

YES   NO   Come to meetings prepared to discuss agenda issues.

YES   NO   Come to meetings on time.

YES   NO   See themselves as part of a team effort.

YES   NO   Act as advocates for the library.

YES   NO   Know their responsibility as board members of the library.

YES   NO   Attempt to exercise authority only during official meetings of the board.

YES   NO   Represent the broad interest of the library and all constituents, not special interests.

YES   NO   Understand that the most efficient way to govern is to delegate management to the director.

Our board plans for the future of the library by...

YES   NO   Annually reviewing and approving the mission statement.

YES   NO   Annually reviewing progress toward the long-range plan and modifying the long-range plan.

YES   NO   Operating from opportunity to opportunity rather than crisis to crisis.

Reinforcements and solutions:

In which of the major categories above does our board show real strength?

In which of the major categories above does our board need improvement?

<u>Notes:</u>