



Committees

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The many and complex issues with which your board works cannot always be handled efficiently by the full board. Many issues may be handed to board committees for study with the understanding the committees will make recommendations to the full board.

At some time in your service on the library board you will be asked to serve on at least one committee and you need to understand the nature and purpose of committees.

Committee work is a good place for board members to offer any special expertise you may have, but service on committees is not limited to experts in the committee subject. Committee service is a good way to learn more about the library.

Often some of the committee members are selected from people outside the board so that additional expertise can be utilized by the board through the committee. Involving non-board members also builds ownership among other members of the public and opens a new avenue of communication between library and community.

Whatever the name or type of committee, the only purpose of that committee is to extend the capabilities of the board. Committees are not autonomous groups with loose connections to the board, but rather extensions of the board and always responsible to the full board.

Committees have no power or authority

Committees have no power or authority beyond what is granted to them by the full board. The only action committees can traditionally take is to study an issue assigned by the full board and make recommendations to the full board about the assigned issues.

If your committee system is well defined and controlled, (board bylaws should describe this) and the committees are being held properly accountable, you should receive regular reports from each committee. The committee reports should explain what the committee has been doing for the board and make recommendations for board action.

Committees are accountable to the full board

Board members not on the committee should feel free to ask questions and get clarification from committee members, but avoid repeating work the committee has done. The purpose

of the committee is to save time for the board. If the full board repeats the committee discussions after the committee reports to the board, the board has not saved time but rather doubled the time spent on the issue.

Types of committees

Your board may already have standing or permanent committees that are described in the bylaws of the library and function year round. As certain important issues arise, the board may also appoint temporary or "ad hoc" committees to study those issues for the board.

At certain times, the board may meet as a committee of the whole. The difference between a meeting of the board as a committee of the whole and a regular board meeting is that the board in committee is focusing on one subject and does not take final action.

Regular board meetings do not allow time for extensive discussion of one issue, so the board meets as a committee of the whole to give itself that time for in-depth discussion. The issue is then presented as a committee report at the regular board meeting and formal action is taken there.

Your board may also have an executive committee. This committee is usually composed of the board officers and the director. It often has limited powers to act for the board in emergencies, but must have all actions ratified by the board at the next regular meeting.

Your responsibility as a committee

You should approach committee meetings as seriously as you do the regular board meetings. Prepare for the meetings, attend the meetings and take part in the discussions. If you have an assignment from the committee, complete it in a timely manner. Remember, committees are an extension of the board.

When you are appointed to a committee, it is your responsibility to learn the mission of the committee, when and where the committee meets and the names of other members of the committee. You should also examine the history of the committee and the minutes of their meetings for at least the past year so that you are up and running with the committee as soon as possible.

Help your committee stay focused on its responsibility and accountability to the full board. Although committee meetings are usually not as formal as a full board meeting, they should have a distinct structure, agenda and goals. When the committee completes its meeting, there should be a clear result of the meeting that can be reported to the full board.

Committees are a valuable extension of the board, but only if they work in an orderly and accountable fashion.

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