

## Montana State Library

# SERVICES TO LIBRARIES

## Trustee Manual

### Working with the Library Staff

Although decisions by the Board affect working conditions, salaries and other aspects of typical employer/employee relationships, you as a trustee need to understand and respect the chain of command in which the director reports to the Board and the staff reports to the director. The law does give the Board the authority to hire, discharge, set salaries, and prescribe duties of the library staff, and in many cases a director may value the input of the Board when hiring. However once someone is hired the relationship between the board, director, and staff is a delicate one. It may become confusing for staff on who to answer to if the board is involved in the day-to-day operations of the library. This might lead to a decrease in productivity. The best practice would be for the Board to delegate hiring, supervising, and evaluation of the library staff to the library director. This can be done through Board bylaws or a decision/motion from the Board. This is considered to be best practice because the director is the one overseeing day-to-day operations and is probably the best person to identify what skills and abilities are needed for a particular position as well as to give constructive feedback to staff when there are problems. This also helps create a clearer chain of command which is helpful for staff.

If the Board chooses to delegate this duty to the director it:

has no direct responsibility for day-to-day supervision of staff other than overseeing the director. Board members have no authority to issue orders to staff or make demands of them except through the director.

has no direct responsibility for assessing staff performance other than that of the director. The director is expected to give the Board regular reports about staff performance.

does not usually act on complaints from the staff. Should a staff member ignore the command structure and take concerns and complaints to a trustee, or the entire Board, it is the trustee(s)' responsibility to remind the individual about the proper procedure.

This command structure is designed to make things work, not to hinder communication. Failure by any trustee to adhere to this structure can result in organizational problems. Not only is the director's authority compromised, so too is the director's job performance. The Board will not be able to hold the director accountable for staff performance if trustees get involved in staff management.

In addition, staff morale will be damaged. Staff will not have a clear understanding of who is in charge and to whom they will be accountable. And once the precedent is set, staff will believe they can go to the Board with every issue, resulting in the director becoming an ineffective figurehead without real authority.

### Developing a Grievance Process

Staff should follow the chain of command if they have concerns, but on occasion staff may need to talk to board members about an issue involving the library director. The Board may wish to look at the city or county's grievance process and either adopt it or develop one for the library board. A grievance process is usually a multi-step process that staff follows in order to address a problem. Generally it starts with the

library director and then if the problem is not resolved the staff takes the concern to the library board. Deciding on what type of grievance process the board would like to use may save the board some trouble in the future.

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