Public Library Boards in Iowa

Describes the five primary roles of the public library board.

Public library boards have five primary roles:

1. Advocate for the library in the community and advocate for the community as a member of the library board. To be a library advocate is to work for the betterment of library services for the community. Advocacy includes working to obtain adequate funding for the library; pursuing opportunities to meet and speak with community groups; getting to know the mayor and city council; making sure the community's needs and interests are paramount when making board decisions.

2. Plan for the future of the library. Planning is one of the most important trusts that the community gives to the library board. Planning is deciding what is going to happen with library services over the next few years. It is taking charge of the library's future and creating it to be responsive to what the community needs.

3. Monitor and evaluate the overall effectiveness of the library. The community puts its trust in the library board to make sure the library is operating the way it should. For example, the library boards is familiar with the library's budget - where the money is coming from and how it will be spent. The board monitors monthly financial reports and approves the bills so they can be paid. The board also helps determine whether the community is satisfied with the service received from the library.

4. Set library policies. The library boards spends much of its time on policy issues - developing policies and monitoring the effectiveness of those policies. (Policy is a carefully designed, broadly stated, written guideline for actions and decision of the library.) Once adopted by the board, library staff carries out the policies on a day to day basis.

5. Hire and evaluate the library director. The board hires a qualified director to manage the day-to-day operations of the library and works with the director, carefully respecting each other's roles. The board also regularly evaluates the director to make sure the library operates well and in the best interest of those the library serves.