

KDLA Trustee Tip June 2018

Library Policies

The library that runs smoothly and equitably is one with well-developed policies that govern personnel, operations, and board activities. These policies provide a framework to ensure that all patrons and personnel know what to expect when visiting or working at the library.

Adopting Policies

The library director or staff often suggest policies as a way to create or modify practices that affect the operations of the library or personnel management. Board members can also suggest a new policy or revisions to an existing one. A policy only becomes official after the library board adopts it during an open meeting. Adopting policies in board meetings provides transparency and opportunities for input from staff, patrons and other stakeholders. The board provides the checks and balances, carefully considering policies with a mind toward consistency, equity, and best practices. It is always a good idea to ask the library's attorney to review a policy prior to adoption. Vetting policies with the library's attorney is the proverbial ounce of prevention, catching potential legal pitfalls before they have the chance to become a difficult or even expensive problem down the line.

Implementing Policies

After the policy is approved, the director ensures that the appropriate staff is aware of the new or revised policy. The director may also develop procedures to guide staff in the application of the policy. Adopted policies should be placed in a policy manual and made available for all staff and board members to access when desired. Some policies, such as an unattended child policy, can also be posted in the library for the public to see.

Bylaw, Policy, or Procedure?

Board members and library staff alike are often perplexed by the difference between policies, procedures and bylaws. In short, bylaws are rules that provide a framework for board operations, policies are guidelines used to coordinate and execute the activities of the library, and procedures provide staff with step-by-step guidance on applying policies. Bylaws and policies require board adoption while procedures are generally produced by the library director.

Evolving and Changing

A library's policies are living documents that can and must adapt to fit the evolving needs of the library. Therefore, policies should be added, removed or revised on a regular basis. Ideally, library directors will suggest policies that address emerging trends in library use or in personnel management well ahead of the need for the policy, avoiding crisis policy-making that can result in policies that are too narrow or targeted to work for the long run. Revisiting policies on a regular schedule, annually for example, can also prevent policies that refer to local, state or federal law from becoming outdated or even illegal as laws change.

KDLA Resources

KDLA Regional Consultants can serve as a sounding board for policies, making suggestions for improvement or offering advice based on other libraries' experience with similar policies. KDLA has examples of several operating and personnel policies on our website. We also have 10 essential board policies we encourage every library to adopt. These can be found at: <https://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/librarypolicies/Pages/default.aspx>. These policies are offered as examples. Again, it is wise to have the library's attorney review all policies prior to adoption. In addition, the *Governance of Kentucky Public Libraries* training course offered as part of the Kentucky Public Library Trustee Certification Program offers in depth information on the difference between laws, bylaws, policies and procedures and can assist trustees in navigating this sometimes complicated area of trusteeship. This class is available online, 24/7 at: <https://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/trustees/Pages/TrusteeCertification.aspx>. As always, please feel free to contact your Regional Consultant for assistance with policy adoption.