

# Tennessee Public Library Trustee Workshop

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# Trustee Tool Kit

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# Understanding the Community

## **What is a public library?**

The public library is a public information utility - much like police protection, garbage pickup, and electricity are public service utilities. That does not mean it forgoes its role in recreational reading, but that it is more than just a building warehousing books.

A public library needs to keep current with new ways to deliver information - not hang on to what has always been adequate. Like it or not, times are changing and, to be viable in the electronic age, libraries must change with them.

## **The public library is a place to get information and to get help finding information.**

The library offers not only a service but is also very much a place. The "place" can be physical or virtual, or a combination of both.

The library is a window to the world, helping to enrich our minds, defend our right to know, safeguard our freedoms, and keep democracy healthy.

## **The public library serves the community.**

**And each trustee is a vital link between the library and the community.** Library board members represent the needs and wishes of the community to the library director and also represent the needs and services of the library to the community. Board members must keep in mind the present and future needs of the entire community served by the library.

Even in the smallest library, it must be remembered that board members represent overall citizen's control of the library, whereas the library director is responsible for carrying out the administration and technical work.

Along with the important legal and budgeting functions, the reason library boards exist is:

### **To make sure that the library serves the needs and interests of the community.**

The basis of every board decision should always be how that decision helps serve the people of the community better.

## **The community is crucial to the library and its services.**

By visiting with other groups and individuals (community stakeholders), library planners can develop a plan for library services that best meets the needs and interests of the community.

The more people you talk to people about the community, the more information you will have to create a long-range plan.

**The community consists of many constituent groups.**

First, it is important to take a Community Analysis of the library's service area. A **COMMUNITY SCAN FORM** is helpful for this process.

**A community analysis identifies the Community Stakeholders:**

- Groups of individuals with similar needs, such as non-English speaking, handicapped, homebound, those needing large print books, or those who could benefit from the library's literacy initiatives.
- Community organizations, such as civic, fraternal, senior citizen, service, recreational.
- Business, professional, and labor organizations, including major industries in the community.
- Education related institutions and organizations.

**Gather information**

Next, each year identify three to five groups/individuals to visit with during the year. Decide which groups board members or the library director will visit. Support the library director spending at least 10% of work time outside of the library building making these visits and attending meetings of Community/Economic development committees and the Chamber of Commerce (library should join). At each of these visits/meetings, find out:

- ✓ *What are they doing?*
- ✓ *What kind of information do they need?*

Probably the most common mistake library planners make when consulting the community is to ask people about the library and what it can do for them. The real purpose of consulting all of these community representatives is to find out about **them** - what **they** are doing and what is important in **their** lives and work.

If you ask someone what the library should be like, they will answer based on their preconceptions (even misconceptions) about what a library is. Instead, inquire about what their groups are doing - what kind of information they need.

The goals of every other organization in the community differ from those of the library. When measured by costs and benefits, **the library is most effective when its resources are applied to fulfilling the goals of other organizations.**

**Value & Vision**

**Public Libraries Must Create Public Value Through Renewal and Reinvention**

**A [next] step is to listen to political leaders and to community residents in systematic ways to better understand their agendas and concerns.** Assign senior staff to monitor each city council member and summarize their individual concerns. Read the minutes of economic development commission meetings as well as those of the chamber of commerce and social agency groups. What are the community leaders' concerns? What would they identify as major community problems or opportunities? How could the library help? ...

**Please note that this step is about listening to our communities, not talking to them.** There is a huge difference. The late Betty Jane Narver, trustee of the Seattle Public Library and chair of the Urban Libraries Council's executive board, taught us the difference between advocates and players. Advocates go out into the community and say "library, library, library." Players go out, listen, and then say "economic development, child safety, literacy. Here's how we can help." There is no question about who is welcome at more tables, or who is more valuable.

- Eleanor Jo Rodger. *American Libraries*, November 2002, pp.50-54.

# Community Stakeholders

## Businesses/Chambers of Commerce /Economic Development Organizations

- major employers
- minority business owners
- small business owners
- visitors' centers
- chambers of commerce (city, county, and ethnic, if any)
- economic development councils
- industry councils
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Community Services Organizations/Associations/ Clubs

- Rotary
- Lions
- Kiwanis
- Optimists
- United Way
- AARP
- AAUW
- DAR
- American Red Cross
- literacy organizations
- Soroptimists
- National Organization for Women
- YWCA
- YMCA
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Cultural Groups

- theater groups
- art leagues
- dance supporters
- arts commission
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Educational Organizations

- public Schools
- independent schools
- colleges
- universities
- PTA
- PTO
- school boards
- home school organizations
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Ethnic Organizations

- ethnic chambers of commerce
- NAACP
- tribal councils
- Latino/Hispanic groups
- Asian groups
- Urban League
- refugee rights associations
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Family Services Organizations

- county department of social services
- family service agency
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Financial Representatives

- bankers
- credit unions
- financial planners
- stockbrokers
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Government/Political Representatives

- city mayor
- county mayor
- city council members
- county commissioners
- city/county fiscal office
- city/county planning office
- law enforcement officers
- job training programs
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Health Organizations

- American Cancer Society
- American Heart Association
- hospitals
- public health nurses
- public health clinics
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Legal Organizations

- legal aid
- ACLU
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Library Representatives**

- school media center staff
- college libraries
- university libraries
- special libraries
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Media Representatives**

- newspaper
- radio
- TV
- ethnic media
- local magazines and newsletters
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Organizations Serving the Disabled**

- Center on Deafness
- Council of the Blind
- state/county/city health and human services
- Easter Seal
- Goodwill
- independent living centers
- United Cerebral Palsy
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Professional Groups**

- medical associations
- Board of Realtors
- bar association
- business and professional women's groups
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Religious Groups**

- ministerial alliance
- youth groups
- Jewish community center
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Senior Centers/Service Organizations**

- area agency on aging
- senior centers
- nursing homes
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Youth Services Organizations**

- Big Brother/Sister
- Boy Scouts
- Girl Scouts
- FFA
- FHA
- child abuse agencies
- city/county recreation programs
- Junior Achievement
- Head Start
- Even Start
- child care associations
- local Association for the Education of Young Children
- school-age care and enrichment programs
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from a training handout prepared by Gail McGovern and Rhea Rubin from *The New Planning for Results*. American Library Association, 2001.