
LIBRARY BOARDS IN VIRGINIA

Public libraries in Virginia are the responsibility of local governments. As organizational entities, libraries fall into four categories:

- **regional libraries** (a library established by two or more political subdivisions that join in maintaining a library system under the terms of a contract)
- **county libraries**
- **city libraries**
- **town libraries**

The *Code of Virginia* requires that all regional libraries and all counties, cities, and towns govern their public libraries through boards of trustees, with the exception of “any city or town with a manager, or... any county with a county manager, county executive, urban county manager, or urban county executive form of government, or Chesterfield County.” These excepted counties, cities, or towns may, if they wish, establish either governing or advisory library boards.

The *Code* also provides the legal framework for counties, cities, and towns that have not established public libraries to appropriate funds for the support and maintenance of library service operated and conducted by a company, society, or association. The boards of these nonprofit, private organizations are appointed by the membership. It is common practice, however, for local governing bodies to appoint one or more members to these boards.

TYPES OF BOARDS

It is important that library board members and local government officials clearly understand the authority, role, and duties of the library board.

A Governing Board is legally responsible for the control and management of the library and all that happens in it. Broad administrative and policy-making duties are specified in the *Code*. As of 2005, there are 66 governing boards in Virginia.

An Advisory Board has only those legal responsibilities granted by the local government. The *Code of Virginia* does not specifically address advisory library boards. The advisory board generally makes recommendations and acts as a liaison between the library, the local government, and the community to promote the library’s services and programs. In reality, the power and authority of an advisory board may fall anywhere along a continuum running from truly advisory to that of an almost-governing board. What the board can or cannot do is determined by the ordinance that established it and the understanding reached over time between the board and the local government. It is important for the board to understand where its authority lies on that continuum. As board members and government officials

change over time, it is necessary for both groups to work to maintain such understandings and communicate them clearly. As of 2005, there are 18 advisory boards in Virginia.

GOVERNING AND ADVISORY BOARDS

Duties and Responsibilities

Governing

1. Employ a competent and qualified library director; maintain an ongoing performance appraisal process for the director.
2. Determine the mission and goals and objectives of the library, and adopt written policies governing the library.
3. Secure adequate funds to carry out the library's program; assist in the preparation of the annual budget. Officially approve budget requests.
4. Ensure that the library has a long-range planning process that considers the library's strengths and weaknesses, and can be implemented and evaluated.
5. Be familiar with local, state, and federal library laws; actively support pending library legislation.
6. Establish, support, and participate in a planned public relations program.
7. Attend all board meetings and see that accurate records are kept on file at the library.
8. Attend regional, state, and national trustee meetings and workshops.
9. Know the services of the Library of Virginia.
10. Report regularly to the governing officials and the general public.

Advisory

1. Recommend a competent and qualified library director.
2. Consider and recommend written policies governing the library.
3. Participate in efforts to secure adequate funds to carry out the library's program.
4. Assist in long-range planning process that considers the library's strengths and weaknesses, and that can be implemented and evaluated.
5. Be familiar with local, state, and federal laws; actively support pending library legislation.
6. Establish, support, and participate in a planned public relations program.
7. Attend all board meetings and see that accurate records are kept on file at the library.
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