

Summary of “Fundamentals of Communicating With and Through Public Library Boards”

by Stacy Torian

In his article about effective communication with hospital boards, health system president Richard Barr (1991) wrote: “...a formal plan for governance communication is a critical concern for hospital administrators” (p. 20). Replace the word “hospital” with “library” and Barr’s statement could easily serve as a guide for administrators of public libraries. In her article “Education for Library Boards: A Library Manager’s View,” Carol Schuyler (2000) described the public library board of trustees as “advisors” and “advocates” who “envision the library’s future, monitor the administration of the library for effective use of library funds, approve policies, oversee the budget and defend intellectual freedom, and work with city, county, and state officials to ensure that all understand the value of the library and its services” (p.16). Just as a hospital board provides the counsel and stewardship that guide a hospital administrator’s management of a hospital, a public library board provides the counsel and stewardship that guide the library director’s running of the public library. Having a well-planned approach to board communication can lead to more informed, constructive discussions between the director and the board about the library’s strategic priorities, which in turn enhances the library’s service to the community.

While there is significant library literature related to working with public library boards in general, there is less devoted specifically to the topic of board communication. In this paper, I synthesized my reading of library and management literature and interviews with library directors to present what could be considered “fundamentals” of director-board communication. After reviewing the literature, I developed the following working definition of communication for a public library board context: *communication with the board is the use of a shared language to exchange well-timed messages around common interests with the intent of furthering the library’s goals.* My research suggests that healthy communication with and through the library board requires a grounding in shared vision and goals, focused board member training, a mutual language, and an openness to diverse perspectives.

References

Barr, R. (1991). Effective board communication. *Trustee*, 44(8), 20.

Schuyler, C. G. (2000). Education for library boards: a library manager's view. *Alki*, 16(3), 15-16.