

What happens in your library when a patron reports suspicious behavior of another patron? What should your staff do when a child has been left in the library at closing time? What do you do if a donor demands that you paint over “The Cat in the Hat” mural in the children’s room in order to get their \$1,000 donation? How do you notify patrons when the library is closed due to bad weather? 🗨️ All of the above can be answered through your written library policies. Policies provide stability for staff, consistency for patrons and protection for the library—all good reasons to make sure your Board has up-to-date policies. 🗨️ This issue of *Across the Board* is devoted to helping you develop and implement policies. Similar help, along with samples, is also available on the MHLS web site through the Trustee Resources section, <http://midhudson.org/trustee/main.htm>. As always, if you have specific questions, contact us by phone or email.

## A C R O S S T H E

# B O A R D

## C R E A T I N G L I B R A R Y P O L I C I E S

### POLICY BASICS

- Policies should be in writing.
- Policies should be written in such a way that they can be applied objectively.
- Policies must be enforced consistently. To insure that they are, review all policies with your director annually and ask your director to review relevant policies with staff and volunteers.
- Policies should provide an appeal mechanism for patrons even if that mechanism is informal, such as a conversation with the director.
- Once you have policies and procedures adopted by the board of trustees, follow them exactly—do not ignore your policies.
- If a policy no longer seems reasonable, change it.

### POLICY VS. PROCEDURE

Boards can get bogged down with details if they try to write procedures into policy. The following definitions should help you keep it simple.

**POLICY:** A written statement that describes how things will be handled, setting the conditions and terms of a situation.

**PROCEDURE:** A written, step-by-step description of how the staff will carry out a policy.

### HOW-TO

- Review policy samples available on the MHLS web site. In addition to those on the web site, other samples are available from Rebekkah Smith, ext. 39 or [rsmith@midhudson.org](mailto:rsmith@midhudson.org).
- Below are some of the types of questions that need to be considered for each policy. Also check the MHLS web site and Sandra Nelson’s book, *Creating Policies for Results: From Chaos to Clarity* (ALA, 2003), for more help.
- Draft your policy with your director and other relevant staff.
- Review the policy with the full board; have your lawyer review your Personnel and other relevant policies; you can request that MHLS staff review your policies as well.
- Board should vote to accept the final version of the policy.

### WRITING POLICIES

Here’s a best practice to get you started: **Don’t rewrite laws and professional standards within your policies — just adopt them or quote them.** For example, it is recommended that your board adopt the following standard American Library Association (ALA) policies:

- Library Bill of Rights
- Confidentiality of Library Records
- Free Access to Libraries for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights
- Freedom to Read Statement
- Freedom to View Statement

(There are links to all of the above ALA policies from the MHLS web site <<http://midhudson.org>> under Trustee Resources, Library Policies.)

Trustees, with help from the director, should develop a set of policies that cover a host of issues. Think of policies as **external**, those that impact patrons directly, and **internal**, those that impact library operations, to make policy writing more manageable.

The following is a list of suggested policies and just some of the issues to consider when developing or reviewing each policy. For more information and samples of each type of policy, visit the *Trustee Resources* section of the MHLS web site: <<http://midhudson.org/trustee/main.htm>>.

(Some of the following issues are excerpted from *Creating Policies for Results: From Chaos to Clarity* by Sandra Nelson, ALA, 2003.)

### EXTERNAL

**Collection Related** ➤ **Collection Development, Maintenance & Materials Selection:** What type of materials do you buy? How do you balance your collection? How do you manage a patron challenge to something purchased? How do you balance your collection with community needs? **Confidentiality of Patron Records:** Why does the library maintain the confidentiality of patron records? What state laws and regulations exist that address confidentiality of patrons’ records? Has the library adopted the Library Bill of Rights or the Code of Professional Ethics (see *Writing Policy* section)? Under what circumstances, if any, will library staff provide borrower-related information concerning a minor child to his or her parent or legal guardian? Which staff member has been designated to respond to court-approved or other requests for borrower information?

**Public Space Related** ➤ **Patron Complaints:** Who handles patron complaints? Is there a form to use? When does the board become involved? How is the patron notified of action taken as a result? **Programming:** What types of programs does the library offer and who decides on the mix of programming? Who may present programs at the library? What statistics will be kept? May groups (day care, school class) attend library programs? **Rules of Conduct for Library Users:** What type of experience do you hope a patron has at your library? Consider issues such as cell phones, food or drinks, concealed weapons, and animals, besides service animals, in the library. What behavior is unacceptable in the library or on the library property? How are patrons made aware of the code of conduct for your library? What should a staff person do if a patron is not following your code of conduct policy? Under what circumstances would the police be brought in? What would be the appeal process for a patron ejected under your policy? **Services for Non-resident Borrowers:** Does your library issue a library card to a nonresident? Are any fees involved? (Remember you can’t charge someone who lives within our system boundaries.) Do you require proof of address? **Unattended Children:** What should staff do when they observe an unattended child in the library? What should staff do when an unattended child is still in the library at closing time or if there is an emergency closing of the building? What should staff do if an unattended child is being disruptive? Under what circumstances are the police called? How are parents made aware of your policy? **Americans with Disabilities Act Statement & Services to Disabled Patrons:** If your building is not handicapped accessible, how will you provide services to individuals who cannot enter your library?

**Meeting Room & Exhibit Space Related** ➤ **Exhibits & Displays:** Are exhibits and displays created only by staff or are other organizations and individuals authorized to create exhibits and displays in the library? What is the process for an outside organization or individual to mount a display?

Does the outside organization need to sign a release to have a display in the library? Who is responsible for the quality of a display? Who schedules displays? Is there a fixed time for a display to be up? Can library materials be used in a display? How is a complaint about a display handled? **Use of Library Meeting Rooms and Equipment:** Who may use the library's meeting room and equipment? Under what circumstances? What events may occur in the library's meeting room? What events are prohibited? May the meeting room be used when the library is closed? Is there a fee? Must a library staff member be present? Must an outside group have insurance to use the meeting room? Are food and beverages allowed?

**Internet Related** ► **Internet:** Who is eligible to use the library's computers to access the Internet? May library patrons use the library's computers to access email, chat rooms, play games, access news groups and so forth? Is there a time limit? Has the library established guidelines for Internet use that all patrons are expected to observe? If so, attach a copy to this policy. How are patrons made aware of the guidelines and policy? Is printing allowed? Is there a charge? Is there a limit to the number of pages that may be printed? What should a staff person do if he or she notices a patron not observing the Internet Use policy? What should a staff person do if a patron reports that another patron is not observing the Internet Use policy? What should a staff person do if a patron reports that they are offended or bothered by the Internet use of another patron? How would a patron request a change be made to the library's Internet Use policy?

## INTERNAL

**Disaster Plan & Emergencies:** How does the library define the terms *emergency* and *disaster*? Who is responsible for reporting an emergency situation at the library and requesting assistance from police, fire, paramedics and others? Where can staff obtain the phone numbers and other contact information to report an emergency? Under what circumstances may staff administer emergency medical assistance? Under what circumstances is the library board informed of an emergency situation at the library? Who is responsible for handling media inquiries about an emergency? How are emergencies or disasters that occur when the library is closed handled? Are staff expected to submit a written report after the emergency or disaster is under control? **Gifts & Fundraising:** How does fundraising support the library's goals and objectives? Can a donor request that donations be used for a particular purpose? Is the donor given a receipt? How does the library recognize donors? Does the library accept gifts of: equipment, furniture,

books, DVDs and/or other library materials, land, stock? Who is responsible for determining whether or not the library will accept a donation? Who determines the amount to be raised and what the funds will be spent on? Where are funds raised deposited? Are the funds invested? **Friends & Fundraising:** How are the library board, director and staff involved? Who is determines the amount to be raised and what the funds will be spent on? Who is responsible for managing the fundraising efforts? Where are the collected funds deposited? Are the funds under the control of the library or the Friends? Are the funds invested? Who has approved the investment plan? How and when are the funds turned over to the library? Is a portion of the funds retained by the Friends? Is there a maximum amount or percentage that can be withheld? Are donors aware that funds are being withheld? How are donors recognized? **Investments:** Does the library make investments? Who handles this? **Interlibrary and Interagency Cooperation:** Does your library supply materials to other libraries or agencies? Under what circumstances? **Personnel:** How are vacancies filled? How is staff expected to act on the job? Is there a dress code? How should staff report harassment? What provisions are made for staff development and training? How are grievances handled? What is the procedure for evaluation? What benefits are offered? Is there vacation/sick time? Under what circumstances can someone be dismissed? **Public Relations:** Who handles public relations for the library? **Purchasing:** Who does the purchasing for the library? What is the board involvement? When does staff need to get bids? How are records kept? **Volunteers:** Does the library use volunteers? How are volunteers solicited? Interviewed? Trained?

To make policy development and review manageable, consider having your board prioritize which policies are needed immediately or which policies haven't been reviewed in a long time. Take one policy per meeting and review or create a schedule of policies for your Policy Committee to create or review and bring back to the board for approval.

For more help on policies (what should be covered and samples from other libraries), visit the MHLS Trustee Resources page at <<http://midhudson.org/trustee/main.htm#policies>>. Also take a look at Sandra Nelson's book, *Creating Policies for Results: From Chaos to Clarity*, available from the MHLS Professional Collection: <[http://midhudson.org/MHLSprofessional\\_collection.htm](http://midhudson.org/MHLSprofessional_collection.htm)>. We are happy to help you review your policies. Please call us any time with your questions: Josh Cohen, Executive Director, can be reached at ext. 17 or [jcohen@midhudson.org](mailto:jcohen@midhudson.org); Rebekkah Smith, Coordinator of Member Information, can be reached at ext. 39 or [rsmith@midhudson.org](mailto:rsmith@midhudson.org).

## FALL 2004 TRUSTEE EDUCATION SERIES

**EACH YEAR**, MHLS provides an education series specifically for member library trustees. Many of those who have attended commented on how valuable it was to meet with and discuss library issues with trustees outside of their own library board. There is a \$100 incentive grant to libraries if at least one of their trustees attends a Mid-Hudson Library System trustee training. The System will mail checks based on attendance.

### Trustee Essential Education Sessions (formerly Basic Trustee Education)

Essential sessions are designed to educate public library trustees in:

- Background and Structure of Libraries in New York State
- Roles and Functions of a Board
- Running Effective Meetings

**1** SATURDAY, 10/9, 10 A.M.–12 P.M.  
*Kingston Library*

**2** THURSDAY, 10/14, 5:30–7:30 P.M.  
*MHLS Auditorium*

### Advanced Trustee Education Sessions

Gain the skills you need as a trustee to manage the future of your library. This session will help you learn how to anticipate trends and prepare an effective plan that responds to community needs in light of regional changes. The program is designed to help you build community support for your library in years to come.

**1** THURSDAY, 10/28, 5:30–7:30 P.M.  
*MHLS Auditorium*

**2** WEDNESDAY, 11/3, 5:30–7:30 P.M.  
*Reed Memorial Library, Carmel*

**3** SATURDAY, 11/20, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.  
*Morton Memorial Library, Rhinecliff*

Register online through the MHLS Calendar at <<http://midhudson.org>> or by calling 845.471.6060 ext. 46.



**SAVE THE DATE!** Friday, November 19th  
The 45th Mid-Hudson Library System Annual Meeting at the Culinary Institute of America