2016 B.C. Public Library Board Governance and Planning Survey Results

A report of the British Columbia Library Trustees Association

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Introduction

Asking where we are going and how are we going to get there has become part of the shared understanding of how organizations meet community expectations and funder requirements. Planning and its accompanying documentation, from vision through to implementation and evaluation, reflect an organization's commitment, responsibility, and value. Public library boards govern one of their community's most cherished institutions and as such are responsible for setting strategic direction, providing fiduciary oversight, and ensuring that operations, through the work of the chief librarian, are well managed. Planning is good governance.

In 2013 the British Columbia Library Trustee Association (BCLTA) surveyed all 71 B.C. public library boards on the topic of governance and planning with a slightly over 80% completion rate. The 2013 report can be found at http://bclta.ca/pdfs/BCLTA_Survey_FINAL.pdf. Three years later, in June of 2016, a similar survey was sent to the 71 boards and the survey closed in September of 2016 with a 76% completion rate. While the difference in completion rates is within acceptable research standards, public library board chairs and chief librarians were contacted to find the reasons for non-completion. In general, the reasons provided fell into one or two of the following three categories:

- There have been too many surveys.

- The results will not make any difference to my library.

- We do not want to share our library's answers to these questions.

In addition to the above feedback, it was requested by some libraries, that the BCLTA provide an environment more conducive to discussing governance and planning as a whole by not reporting results by size of library. The purpose of the survey is to point to trends and practices and then to improve resources and support so that all library boards may participate in those trends and practices. As such, the BCLTA has agreed to this request with the understanding that it does need to be reported that the difference in results, between small, medium, and large libraries is similar to the 2013 findings.

In October of 2016, the Libraries Branch, Ministry of Education released the strategic plan, *Inspiring Libraries, Connecting Communities: a vision for public library service in B.C.* which states, that "Effective governance is achieved through planning, policy development and information sharing." (p.12) B.C. public library boards participate in these practices across the province and the responses to the 2013 and 2016 governance surveys suggest that there is opportunity for the BCLTA, working with trustees, the Association of B.C. Public Library Directors, other library partners, and the Libraries Branch, to be able to support stronger and more consistent governance and planning practices across the province.

Overview of Survey Results

The Boards

There are approximately 700 library trustees in B.C. serving on 71 public library boards. Of the 71 public libraries in the province, 54 responded to the 2016 survey, providing a response rate of 76%.

From the 54 library boards that responded to the survey, the following was found:

- 45% of the responding boards have vacant positions
- The board chair gives, on average, 10 hours a month to board work, including meetings.
- Trustees give, on average, 4.5 hours a month to board work, including meetings.
- From the responding boards it can be extrapolated that across the province approximately 46,000 hours of trustee time is given to public libraries.
- From the responding boards, 32% of trustees had received TOP training and 17% had attended a library conference in the previous three years.

Response Rates and Categories

Small: For the purposes of the 2016 survey, small refers to libraries serving populations 10,000 and under. This category combines the provincial categories of Rural (1,000 and under), Very Small (1,001 – 5,000), and Small (5,001 – 10,000). Provincially, there are 39 libraries in the Small category and 27 of those libraries responded to the survey, providing a 69% response rate.

Medium: For the purposes of the 2016 survey, medium refers to libraries serving populations of 10,001 to 50,000. Provincially, there are 17 libraries in the Mid-Sized category and 13 of those libraries responded to the survey, providing a 76% response rate.

Large: For the purposes of the 2016 survey, large refers to libraries serving populations of 50,001 or more. Provincially, there are 15 libraries in the Large category and 13 of those libraries responded to the survey, providing a 87% response rate.

When breaking out the libraries by region, 100% of Metro Vancouver Libraries, 73% of libraries in Southwest B.C., 71% of libraries in the Southern Interior and Kootenays, and 68% of Northern libraries responded to the survey.
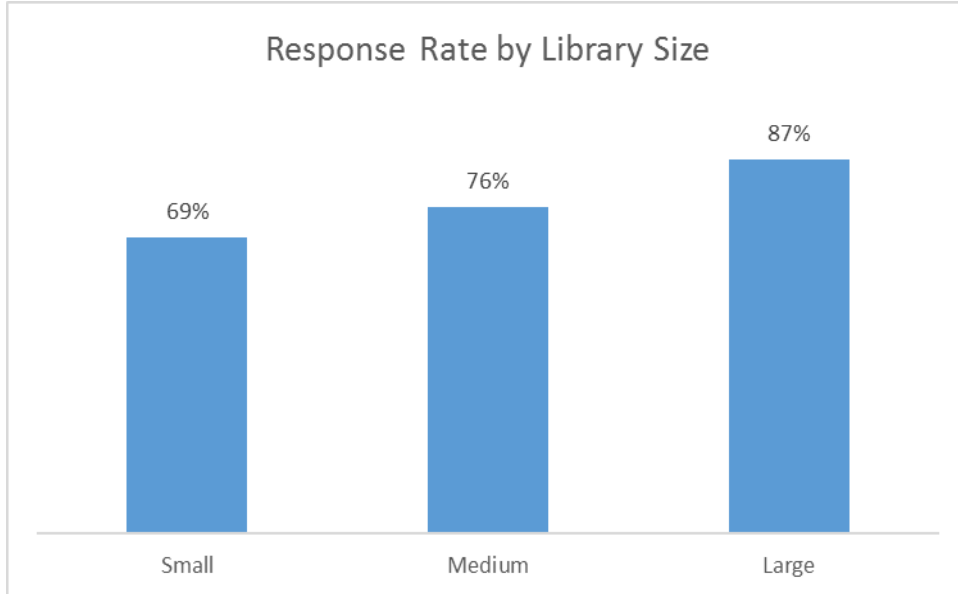

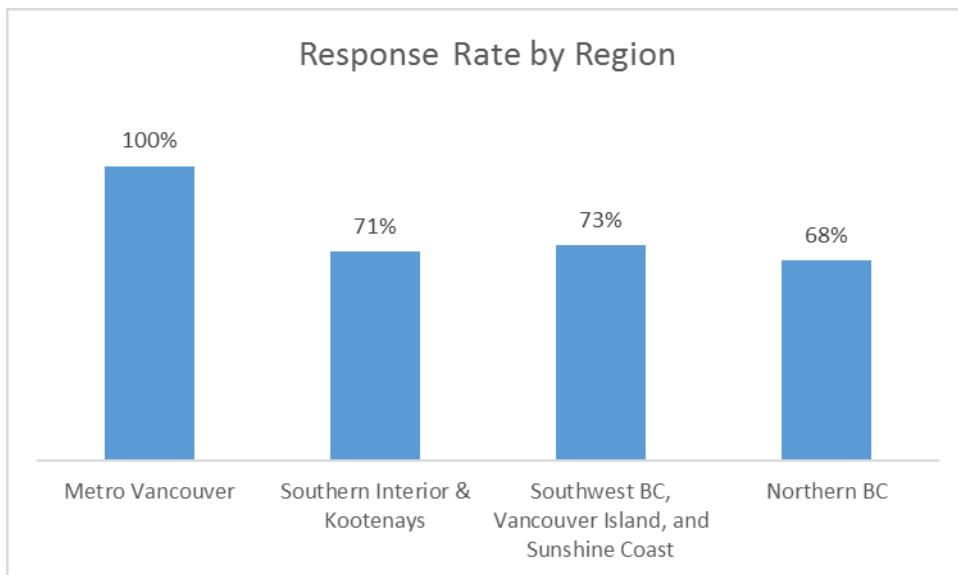**Figure 1: Response Rate by Library Size (2016 Annual Survey)**

Figure 2: Response Rate by Region (2016 Annual Survey)

Library Planning

Similar to the 2013 governance survey responses, the 2016 governance survey results find that library boards are more likely to have strategic plans and financial plans, than any other type of plan. Survey responses suggest that these two types of plans are strongly encouraged by funders and government and are closely linked to operational funding and capital investments. Survey responses also point to the role of local government and other civic or funding partners in developing capital, facilities and disaster plans for the library as part of larger civic or partner plans.

Figure 3: Types of Plans in Place (2016 Annual Survey)

Planning Supports and Resources

In 2013 the responding boards indicated that the type of support most needed was examples and/or templates of plans (56%), followed by professional training or facilitation (37%).

In 2016 39% of the reporting boards indicated that they had found other library examples and resources most beneficial to their own planning and 59% indicated that in-house and local experts had been the most beneficial support. Interestingly, for future planning, the highest response, at 47% of the responding boards, indicated that other library examples and resources

would be most useful, followed by additional research and workshops at 24%, with in-house and local experts at a distant fourth in importance at 16%.

Beneficial Supports and Resources for Current Plans

Category	Percentage
In-house and local experts	59%
Other Library Examples and Resources	39%
Municipal Resources	26%
Consultants/Facilitators	26%
Additional Reseach /Workshops	17%
BCLTA Resources	15%

Figure 4: Beneficial Support and Resources for Current Plans (2016 Annual Survey)

Resources for future Plans

Category	Percentage
Other Library Examples and Resources	47%
Additional Reseach /Workshops	24%
Consultants/Facilitators	24%
In-house and local experts	16%
BCLTA Resources	11%
Municipal /Government Resources	11%
Financial Resources	5%

Figure 5: Support and Resources Desired for Future Plans (2016 Annual Survey)

Infrastructure Funding

In the 2013 *Planning and Governance Survey of BC Public Libraries* report, 66% of responding libraries had strategic plans. Of the libraries with strategic plans, 90% had received project funding for infrastructure in the previous three years. Seventy-three percent of responding libraries had financial plans. Of the libraries with financial plans, 100% received project funding for infrastructure in the past three years. These numbers suggested a strong connection between planning and funding; further investigation would be required to ascertain if the funding was a direct result of the plans or if the planning process was part of the funding process.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents to the 2016 survey received project funding for infrastructure between 2013 and 2016. The comments regarding infrastructure funding suggest that many anticipate a trend in needing to apply for infrastructure funding from a greater variety of funders. This trend was noted in the 2011 *Infrastructure Survey* and the 2013 *Planning and Governance Survey*.

Respondents to the 2016 survey cited government, particularly municipal and regional, as the most common sources for infrastructure funding between 2013 and 2016. Other sources such as corporate and philanthropic donations also provided funding along with individual donors, local and regional funding agencies, and fundraising events. When asked about future funding sources for infrastructure, only 66% of respondents expect municipal funding (compared to 77% in 2013) and 29% expect federal funding (compared to 17% in 2013).

Funding Sources for Infrastructure 2013-2016

Source	Percent
Municipality	77%
Regional District	23%
Province	17%
Federal	17%
Corporate Donations	33%
Philanthropic Donations	53%
Other	27%

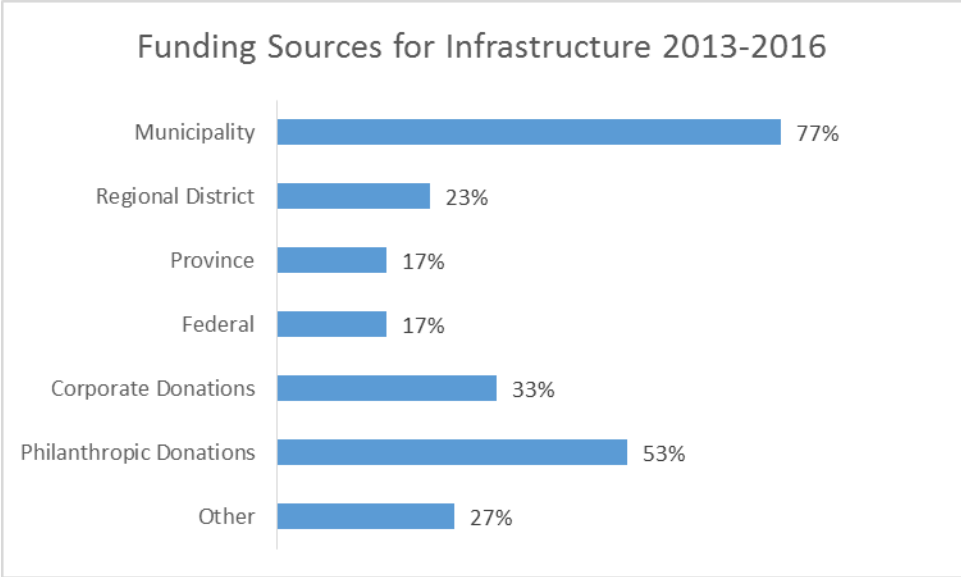**Figure 6: Funding Sources for Infrastructure 2013-2016 (2016 Annual Survey)**

Future Sources for Infrastructure Funding

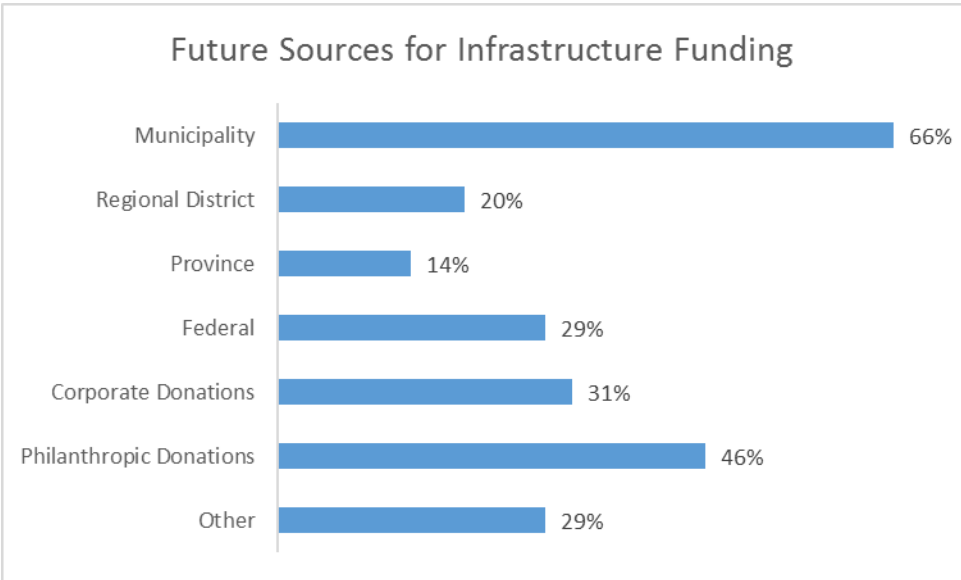| Source	Percent
Municipality	66%
Regional District	20%
Province	14%
Federal	29%
Corporate Donations	31%
Philanthropic Donations	46%
Other	29%

Figure 7: Future Sources for Infrastructure Funding (2016 Annual Survey)

Board Development and Evaluation

Orientation and Succession Planning

In the 2013 *Planning and Governance Survey of BC Public Libraries* report, 58% of responding boards provided written responsibilities and expectations to new trustees and 69% provided an orientation of the local library.

An increase in both of these areas was reported in 2016 with 62% of responding boards reporting that they provided written responsibilities and expectations to trustees and 77% reporting that they had an orientation plan. The figure below reports percentages based on the responses of the public libraries that participated in the survey.

Board Development and Evaluation

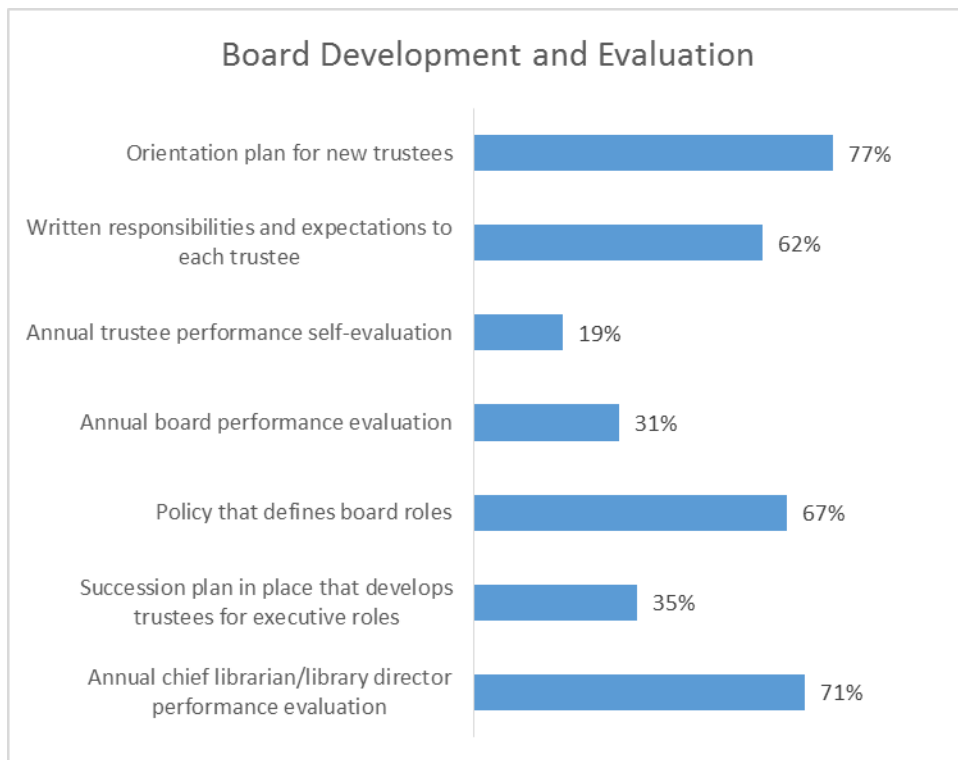| Category	Percentage
Orientation plan for new trustees	77%
Written responsibilities and expectations to each trustee	62%
Annual trustee performance self-evaluation	19%
Annual board performance evaluation	31%
Policy that defines board roles	67%
Succession plan in place that develops trustees for executive roles	35%
Annual chief librarian/library director performance evaluation	71%

Figure 8: Board Development and Evaluation (2016 Annual Survey)

Those libraries that reported that they did not have orientation plans or written responsibilities and expectations for trustees were asked to comment. The following responses are representative:

- Not needed as informal orientation and mentoring is suitable for size of library.
- Plans are in development.
- Need more support from BCLTA in regards to developing expectations and delivering orientation.
- Relying on the Federations to develop orientation and roles/responsibility materials.
- Lack of funding and support for this board work.
- *Library Act* provides the necessary information.

In 2016, 67% of the responding boards had a policy defining board roles such as the executive offices of president, vice-president and treasurer, and 35% had a succession plan in place that develops trustees for executive roles. The following are representative of the comments provided from boards that did not have policy defining board roles and/or a succession plan:

- Not relevant or a lack of interest due to the size of our library and the role of the board.
- Policy and/or a succession plan are in development.
- Uncertainty due to lack of knowing the library's board policies or practices.
- Need more support from BCLTA, such as templates, for developing policy.
- The Library Act is used for this policy.
- Board recruitment and high-turnover is the priority challenge.
- Limited staff capacity to support the board with this work.

Evaluation

In the 2013 *Planning and Governance Survey of BC Public Libraries* report 81% of reporting library boards responded that they were using an evaluation tool. The tools and the citing of their use were as follows:

- Annual evaluation of the chief librarian - 76% of respondents.
- Annual board performance review - 34% of respondents.

- Annual trustee performance self-evaluation - 32% of respondents.

In the 2016 survey results the tools and the citing of their use were as follows:

- Annual evaluation of the chief librarian - 71% of respondents.

- Annual board performance review - 31% of respondents.

- Annual trustee performance self-evaluation - 19% of respondents.

While inconclusive without further investigation, the results suggest that the practice of evaluation has held steady with a small decrease in trustee performance self-evaluation. Given the survey comments regarding challenges with recruitment and high-turnover on some boards, it would not be surprising to find that some boards have missed a year or two with evaluating trustee performance due to board capacity.

The following themes emerged from the comments provided from boards that did not perform an annual evaluation of the chief librarian:

- Lack of capacity and time for evaluations.

- Not considered relevant.

- Recruitment of the chief librarian is more of a priority.

- HR work is done by the municipality.

- The evaluation process is in development.

The following themes emerged from the comments provided from boards that did not perform an annual trustee performance self-evaluation and/or a board performance evaluation:

- Lack of capacity and time for evaluations.

- Not considered relevant / not appropriate for a volunteer board.

- The evaluation process is in development.

- Board recruitment and high-turnover is the priority challenge.

- Use the strategic plan and annual report to the Libraries Branch as the evaluation tool for overall library performance.

Stakeholder Engagement

In 2013 library boards were asked to rate their relationships with various stakeholders as High (relationships are well established), Medium (relationships are in place and more engagement is taking place), or Low (relationships are in progress). The responses were averaged and suggested that local/municipal relationships were the strongest and that other relationships, such as those with MLAs or MPs were not as well established.

The 2016 survey further investigated these stakeholder relationships both in terms of the frequency of engagement and the impact or outcomes from that engagement.

Frequency of Stakeholder Engagement

In 2016 library boards were asked "Approximately how often, per year, does your board engage with the following stakeholders?" The table below shows the average number of meetings per year as calculated from the total responses provided by the survey participants. An average was used for this report to build on the understanding established in the 2013 report.

The maximum number is included as it importantly reflects the difference in practices among the many library boards.

	Average number of meetings per year	Maximum number of meetings per year
Mayor	4	20
Council Members	6	20
Regional District Directors	2	12
MLA	1	11
MP	1	6
Community Leaders	5	25
Trustees in other Library Systems	2.5	12

Figure 9: Stakeholder Engagement (2016 Annual Survey)

The survey then asked, "Please comment on the quantity of engagement your board has with stakeholders."

The following are representative of the comments:

- Significant increase of engagement through the strategic planning process and implementation.

- We do this when we need funding.

- Limited opportunities for the board.

- Responsibility of the staff.

- Need more time, confidence and skill for engagement.

- Inviting high-profile stakeholders to events (SRC, book sales, and fundraisers) increases engagement.

- High level of contact through the appointed councillor on board or through mayor and councillors being the board.

- Not relevant as there is a council representative on the board and no problems to discuss / plan to be proactive and not just rely on the council representative.

- Board and staff community involvement increases frequency of engagement.

- Limited engagement due to small community and library / very active engagement due to small community and library.

- Expect BCLTA to engage with MLAs, MPs and other provincial and federal organizations.

Impact or Outcomes of Stakeholder Engagement

In 2016 library boards were asked to rate and comment on the impact or outcomes of the board's engagement with stakeholders. The results suggest that impact or outcomes are connected with frequency.

In general, those which have frequent meetings or ongoing formal and informal encounters with government officials and staff, recognized community leaders, and trustees in other systems rate the impact or outcomes from that engagement as positive or highly positive. Those that have low amounts of engagement rate the impact or outcomes as neutral or poor.

There were three libraries that rated the impact or outcomes as poor, despite the frequency (greater than five times a year) of meetings with local government. Survey comments suggest that these libraries may have challenging relationships with their local government due to differing understandings of, and approaches to, funding and infrastructure needs.

Survey participants were asked to, "Please comment on the quantity of engagement your board has with stakeholders." The following comments are representative:

- Our municipal mayor and council have increased our budget to provide more staff and have supported our plans to expand our building on municipal land. We have had positive interactions with our federal and provincial representatives; we are awaiting results of our funding applications.
- Very difficult to get support or funding for programs or projects.
- Where it's targeted as in our engagement with the Mayor and Council, it's been well received and positive.
- It has been very positive and usually when the library has requested something, they do their best to help us achieve our goals!
- Effective communication = no surprises.
- Creates visibility, improves relevance, gains support, stimulates ideas.

- Our MP puts in a good word for us to get a Canada Jobs Summer Student. Our MLA advocates for Libraries in general. Our Mayor and Council has always been supportive of the Library. Giving us small increases over the years for our budget despite cuts or no increases from other sectors. As of January 2016 our funding was increased slightly after no increase since 2005. We also receive occasional grants for special projects.

- We're holding our own but trying to engage in discussions about the present and evolving roles of our library in our area hasn't progressed at all.

- The community is engaged. Community members participate in surveys, strategic planning, volunteering at the library, donating for the annual book sponsorship fundraiser.

- Our Board's engagement with stakeholders has helped our Library establish and maintain its central role in the community. We are seen as a vibrant part of the network.

- The most important for us is our engagement with Mayor and Council. That is where 95% of our funding comes from, and we are in competition with every other department for funding, especially for large capital projects. We constantly have to remind them of our value to voters, and this can be difficult given the many pressures on their time and their money.

- We are becoming more proactive advocates.

- There is always room for improvement in this area. We are a small community so the trustees and the director engage with stakeholders on a regular basis but could always focus more on specific advocacy.

- Our engagement with stakeholders has directly increased our funding for special projects.

- We leverage resources, abilities and community buy-in by working with our stakeholders. It's very important to us.

- Impact is very positive when engagement occurs.

- Council has a better understanding of what we provide our community.

- Our engagement with stakeholders has a huge impact on the perception of the library as a vital hub in the community. Good relationships assist in funding requests. Participation of stakeholders in library events raises community awareness of the library and helps build a health community.
- Very positive and worthwhile.
- We don't have time to interact. We are currently going through the exercise of determining our stakeholders, how and if they engage with us, what they know about us. Once that is finished we will be developing a plan to engage with the stakeholders.
- Stimulates our thinking about our own Library and our community; helps us see opportunities and respond to issues.
- Awareness factor - The library is not only about books. More and more we are becoming a center for civic engagement. (Worksafe BC, job fairs, multicultural events, etc.) Senior local government staff participated in our most recent strategic planning process. This allowed them to get engaged and better understand the library.
- Mayor & Council have a much better appreciation of the value of the library to the community and as a result our relationship has been significantly strengthened.

Challenges

In the 2013 *Planning and Governance Survey of BC Public Libraries* report, the survey participants were asked to provide the most significant challenges they faced in 2013, and the most significant challenges they expect to face in the next three years. The challenges and the percentage of responding boards citing those challenges for 2013 were as follows:

- Funding - 36% of respondents.

- Plans - 29% of respondents.

- Infrastructure - 24% of respondents.

- Meeting Community Needs - 22% of respondents.

- Technological Changes - 16% of respondents.

- Retaining Library Staff, Directors, Board Members - 15% of respondents.

The 2013 report stated that the "relative challenges do not change over the next three years, just the intensity or importance." It is interesting to note from the 2013 survey results that plans, as a challenge for the next three years (2013-2016) were not cited by the respondents, whereas the challenges of funding (60%), infrastructure (39%), meeting community needs (32%) and technological changes (30%) were all perceived as increasing in their significance to library boards.

In the 2016 survey, 39% of the respondents cited funding/fundraising as their most significant current challenge, closely followed by infrastructure (which is strongly related to funding) at 28%. This suggests that there has not been fundamental change for boards as a whole, in regards to these two challenges, in the past 3 years. These two challenges maintain their position of top concern for the next three years.

Given the comments throughout the survey results regarding the role of boards and the need for support, templates and other resources for doing board work, it is interesting to note that board development is a significant challenge for 26% of the respondents.
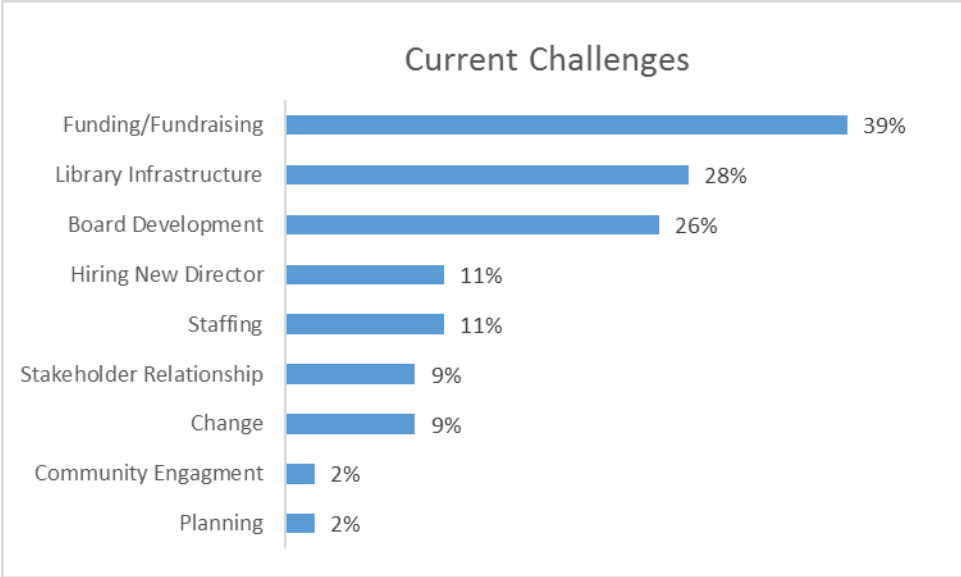
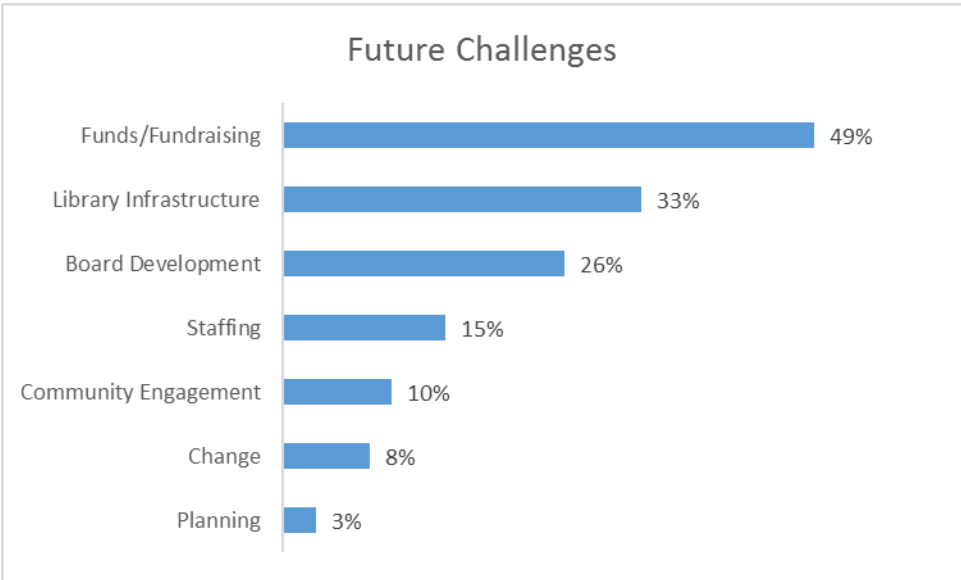**Figure 10: Current Challenges (2016 Annual Survey)**

Figure 11: Future Challenges (2016 Annual Survey)

The Final Word

The final section of the survey was an open comment box. Responses are below.

- There is very little board engagement, emails asking for direction or feedback go unanswered and getting enough trustees to attend the board meeting for quorum is almost impossible.

- Being in a somewhat rural and isolated area it is often difficult to maintain contact and access the support of other libraries, other trustees , and training opportunities

- I have a strong abhorrence of maintaining our operations in the face of diminishing real-world resources by accepting any P3 models or community begging to fund an ongoing minimal existence.

- The continued support/enhancement of the public library system is a worthwhile investment, not just a service.

- The BCLTA could help us with the diversification we need to do to stay relevant.

- Thanks to you (BCLTA). Your resources and programs are of great assistance to our library, staff and trustees!

- The rate of change and introduction of new services and opportunities into the Library can be a challenge for some staff. How to manage transition.

- I think that the Province should be providing more financial support for Libraries.

- I spend too much time and energy defending the Library and not enough promoting it.

Appendix A: Results at a Glance by Region (2016 Annual Survey)

The libraries that responded to the survey were placed into the following groups to best reflect the results:

- North: Northern BC
- Southern Interior & Kootenays
- Southwest BC: Southwest BC, Vancouver Island, and Sunshine Coast
- Metro Vancouver

	Region			
	North **(n=17)**	**Southern Interior & Kootenays** **(n=15)**	**Southwest BC** **(n=10)**	**Metro Vancouver** **(n=11)**
Average Number of Trustee Positions	8.5	10	13.5	10
Yes there are Vacant Positions	59%	60%	18%	30%
Average Board Chair hours per month	8	7	12	15
Average Trustee hours per month	3	3	4.5	7
Trustees with TOP Training	4	3.5	4	7
Trustees attended library conference	2	4	2.5	4
Planning				
% with Strategic plan	88%	73%	91%	100%
% with Annual business plan	0%	13%	45%	70%
% with Annual financial plan	82%	67%	73%	80%
% with Facilities master plan	29%	0%	45%	60%
% with Capital plan	12%	7%	36%	80%
% with Disaster plan	12%	7%	9%	50%
Funding				
Infrastructure Funding 2013 – 2016	35%	53%	73%	80%
Anticipate Infrastructure Funding in the Future	53%	73%	82%	60%
Development and Evaluation				
Orientation plan for new trustees	71%	67%	82%	90%
Written responsibilities and	53%	47%	64%	90%

expectations to each trustee				
Annual trustee performance self-evaluation	6%	20%	27%	30%
Annual board performance evaluation	12%	27%	36%	60%
Policy that defines board roles	65%	60%	73%	70%
Succession plan in place that develops trustees for executive roles	24%	27%	55%	40%
Annual chief librarian/library director performance evaluation	71%	60%	64%	90%
Average number of Annual Meetings with Stakeholder Group				
Mayor	5	4	2	4
Council Members	8	8	3	4
Regional District Directors	1	3	3	<1
MLA	1	1	<1	2
MP	1	<1	<1	1
Community Leaders	5	5	5	5
Trustees in other Library Systems	2	2	3	4
Rating of Stakeholder Relationship				
Mayor	3.3	2.9	3.1	3.6
Council Members	3.5	2.9	3.2	3.6
Regional District Directors	2.5	2.7	2.9	2.3
MLA	2.9	2	2.7	2.8
MP	2.8	2.2	2.8	2.4
Community Leaders	3.1	2.8	3.4	3.5
Trustees in other Library Systems	2.9	2.7	3	3.3