

Board Discussion Starter

**Chairing the Board**

*An effective chair, the people in our study largely concurred, provides leadership not to the company but to the board, enabling it to function as the highest decision-making body in the organization. As one survey respondent put it: “The chair is responsible for and represents the board, while the CEO is responsible for and is the public face of the company.” That crucial distinction makes the chair’s job very different from the CEO’s, and it calls for specific skills and practices.*

[“How to be a Good Board Chair”](https://hbr.org/2018/03/how-to-be-a-good-board-chair), *HBR*. Stanislave Shekshnia (March/April 2018).

Trustees bring a diversity of experiences, skills, knowledge, and questions to public library board work. Board policies and practices vary across the province and BCLTA is focused on common issues of common concern for board development. Your board chair, your library director, and BCLTA all have a role in helping you find further resources specific to your needs. The Libraries Branch staff are available for all questions regarding the Library Act.

Your chairing the board discussions might cover a wide range of topics such as:

* Identifying the role and responsibilities of the board chair, of individual trustees, and of the library director for successful governance.
* The board chair and library director working relationship (trust, communications, support, shared vision).
* Knowledge of public library values and principles for leading board work.
* Reviewing board policy and any board committee terms of references that refer to the role of the board chair.
* Board chair orientation (what has worked, could work better, and needs to stop or start)
* Meeting norms and etiquette that support the effective role of the board chair.
* BCLTA Board Discussion Starter: [Board recruitment and succession planning](https://www.bclta.ca/board-recruitment-and-succession-planning/).
* BCLTA Board Discussion Starter: [Board development and evaluation](https://www.bclta.ca/board-development-and-evaluation/).

**Resources**

**Chairing the Board**

[BCLTA Chairing the Board Workshop](https://www.bclta.ca/trustee-education__trashed/chairing-the-board/)

May 12th, 2019

1pm-4pm

City Centre Library, Surrey Libraries

[The Role of the Board Chair](https://boardsource.org/resources/board-chair-role/), *Board Source*. June 7, 2016.

[How to Chair a Board Meeting](https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/how-to-chair-a-board-meeting/), *Board Effect*. Jeremy Barlow, February 18, 2016.

* Emphasizes that the role of the chair is keeping order and facilitating discussion for a productive meeting.
* Quick useful overview of board meeting components and the role of the chair.

[Chairing a Board Meeting](http://www.governinggood.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Chairing-a-Board-Meeting.pdf), Dalhousie University College of Continuing Education. E. Grant MacDonald, 2012.

* Quick but thorough treatment of the purpose of the board chair; to facilitate order and participation for productive meetings and effective decision making.
* Good points on establishing the meeting environment, encouraging full participation and open discussion while maintaining order, keeping the discussions on track and being productive.

[10 Great Board Chair Practices](https://www.compasspoint.org/blog/10-great-board-chair-practices), *Compass Point*. Marla Cornelius, February 12, 2016.

1. Set an inspiring tone
2. Take a learner's stance
3. Value staff and respect their input
4. Bring your whole self to the role
5. Know that time doesn’t stop between meetings
6. **Partner with the ~~executive director~~ library director!**
7. Talk about cultural differences, power, and privilege
8. Zero tolerance for bad behavior
9. Be a fundraising champion
10. Replace yourself

BCLTA Board Discussion Starter: [Diversity and Inclusivity](https://www.bclta.ca/resources-links/board-discussion-starters/).

A strong and credible public library board is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the community. The board chair leads the board in demonstrating public library values such as intellectual freedom, equity, inclusivity, access, and privacy along with commonly held governance principles such as transparency, accountability, openness, community engagement, and reconciliation. These values and principles inform the attitudes and behaviour of the board chair and guide board work such as strategic planning, policy development, financial oversight, and the hiring and professional development of the library director.

**Effective Board Meetings**

Effective Board Meetings*,* [*BCLTA TOP Workbook*](https://www.bclta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TOP-Workbook-February-2019.pdf)*,* p29.

* See the activity on p. 31 for developing your own effective board meeting checklist.

[10 Tips for Improving Your Board Meetings](http://www.governinggood.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Ten-Tips-For-Improving-Your-Board-Meetings-1.pdf), *Governing Good*. E. Grant MacDonald, 2016.

* Use these 10 tips for your board meeting check-list.
* Tips 6 and 7 are important and so often missed!

*6. Build some time into the agenda for increasing affiliation and trust amongst directors. This can enhance the board’s ability to think together.*

*7.* *Share some food! Having a pot of coffee on and a plate of cookies, cheese and crackers, apple slices or a dish of candy to pass around is good for setting a positive atmosphere.*

[Effective Board Meetings for Good Governance](https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/effective-board-meetings-good-governance). National Council of Nonprofits (n.d).

* Quick article covering the expected such as timed agendas, consent agendas, and staying on track and rich with links to other resources.
* While US and non-profit centric, the basic rules and principles for board meetings apply to public library boards.

[Better Use of Board Time](https://www.thevantagepoint.ca/resources/better-use-board-time)

Freely available resource from [Vantage Point](https://www.thevantagepoint.ca/)

From the website:

*Most boards spend fewer than 25 hours each year together around the board table – it’s important that this time be used wisely and effectively, discussing matters of consequence and keeping an eye towards the future. This tool can be used as a conversation starter with your board members to reflect on what makes the best use of your board’s time and identify potential changes to your board meeting agenda or board calendar.*

**Board Chair and Library Director Work**

Selecting and Supporting the Library Director*,* [*BCLTA TOP Workbook*](https://www.bclta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TOP-Workbook-February-2019.pdf)*,* p33.

* This section will provide some BC public library context for the important working relationship between the board chair and the library director.

[Board Chair & Executive Director Partnership Check-Up](https://www.thevantagepoint.ca/resources/board-chair-executive-director-partnership-check)

Freely available resource from [Vantage Point](https://www.thevantagepoint.ca/)

From the website:

*Three critical markers reflect the health of this relationship: an openness to provide and receive constructive feedback; decision-making driven by mutual respect, trust and empathy; and a shared orientation toward tackling mission-critical work.*

[Better Together: How Nonprofit Executives and Board Chairs Build Leadership Partnerships](http://johnfulwider.com/bettertogether/). John Fulwider (2017)

While the website is intended as a door to purchasing consulting services and materials, it also has value for prompting thinking about the board chair and library director relationship in regards to:

* Shared vision
* Strong communication
* Respect and trust
* Clarity of roles and responsibilities
* Having a positive impact on funding, goals, and service to the community

From the website:

*OK to Good to Great*

*Think with me about leadership partners along a simple continuum from OK to good to great.*

*OK is simply tolerating working together. Tolerating working together isn’t good enough. It’s not what we’re going for. We know we as leaders deserve more for ourselves, and the mission deserves more as well.*

*Good is having a clear direction for the organization and working separately to lead the staff and the board in that direction. The CEO leads the staff and the board chair leads the board. Meetings will run smoother. We’ll do fine as a default. The middle is not bad. But it could be even better. We can go beyond running effective meetings.*

*Great is changing the world together. It’s completing together that transformational project only the two of you can accomplish with your unique blend of talents and interests.*

*Joy-inducing, world-changing partnerships are possible. Changing the world is better together.*

**Trustee Roles and Responsibilities**

[*Duties and Responsibilities of the Library Board*](https://nvdpl.ca/sites/default/files/BG-GOV-01.4_DutiesAndResponsibilitiesOfTheBoard.pdf), North Vancouver District Public Library, 2016.

* Concise and easy to understand.
* Provides a guiding principles approach to establishing the boards governance and oversight roles and responsibilities and the library director’s operational management role and responsibilities.

[“Ontario Public Library Governance at a Glance”](http://accessola.com/olba/pdf/cut_to_the_chase.pdf), *Cut to the Chase*. Ontario Library Board Association, 2007.

* Highly accessible, useful and applicable information regarding the role and responsibilities of the board.
* Explicit and useful points for clarifying governance versus operations, such as that board financial oversight does mean ensuring that financial policies are in place and does not mean challenging a miniscule amount on a budget line.

West Vancouver Memorial Library, [WVML Library Board](https://westvanlibrary.ca/about-us/wvml-library-board)

* Clear description of municipal library board governance.
* Useful links such as the one-pager [Governance of West Vancouver Memorial Library Board.](https://westvanlibrary.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/board/GOVERNANCE_OF_WVML.pdf)

[Board Roles and Responsibilities Checklist,](https://boardsource.org/board-roles-and-responsibilities-checklist/?utm_content=80947489&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&hss_channel=tw-14982854) Board Source. (n.d.)

**Contact BCLTA to add your resources, templates, or policies to this Discussion Starter.**