

BCLTA Message for ABCPLD: Governance and COVID-19

March 16, 2020

Babs Kelly, Executive Director, BCLTA

Dear all,

I am, as always, impressed with the leadership team at ABCPLD and greatly appreciate their gathering of expertise and information to support library directors with their management responsibilities during this time of COVID-19 concern.

We know, given how quickly direction and advisement is evolving from different levels of government and from health authorities, that it is important that library directors, as management, can and should make decisions for keeping staff and communities calm and healthy, and the number of COVID-19 cases low on a day-to-day operational level.

Over the past few days I have received many questions regarding the role of boards during this time.

Specifically, I have been asked if a board motion is required for closing the public library. This all depends.

1. Hopefully the board will have already given authority to the library director to respond in urgent and emerging situations such as a pandemic. That is a standing authority that then allows the library director to make decisions in crisis or emerging crisis situations, such as fire, earthquakes, and pandemics. Those decisions are then reviewed and discussed at a future board meeting. Therefore, no new board motion is required.
2. If the above doesn't exist, it is still the responsibility of the library director to make operational management decisions. The library director will have considered the health and safety of staff and volunteers and the well-being of the community. They will have also considered the operating environment which includes the health authority, government, and decisions or directions that are being made locally, such as the cancelling of public programs or the closure of public spaces.
3. If it is a precautionary closure, as in it is not being mandated by the health authority or requested by local government, then the board chair and the library director **may** decide to call an emergency board meeting (remote access) to get board direction and support.

At that time the board may choose to record a motion that supports the library director with their operational management authority.

While the nature of how governance teams (boards, chairs, and library directors) varies across the province, in general the role of the board chair and board includes the following:

1. Support the operational and management role of the library director. Understand that the library director is focused on the concerns and well-being of staff, volunteers, and the community. Be clear that the library director has the support of the board for managing the situation.
2. Be a governance partner. The board chair should make themselves available to the library director for updates and as someone to talk to. The job of the board, through the board chair, is to support one person. The job of the library director is to support and manage many. The library director needs a trusted and empathetic governance partner.
3. Communicate. The board chair should communicate to the board that they are in touch with the library director and that updates will be provided as necessary.
4. Plan for your next board meeting. What will be your fiduciary, strategic, and generative discussions regarding COVID-19 and your public library?
 - Did your emergency or crisis board policies meet the needs of the library during this time?
 - Do your policies include what to do when the municipality or district cancels programs or closes public facilities for health precautions?
 - Are there clear guidelines that support the library director to manage an emerging and quickly changing situation?
 - Did you as a board clearly understand the library's responsibilities to staff?
5. Make a big deal out of acknowledging the leadership of the library director and the work of staff during what is a stressful time for many.

Huge thanks to ABCPLD for sharing this message from BCLTA. We ask that library directors share this with their boards and that board chairs let BCLTA know what we might do to best support the work of your governance team.

Babs Kelly