

Public Library Pandemic Response

Library Board Governance During the COVID-19 Outbreak

The *Libraries Act* governs how library boards operate and provides the framework within which public library service is to be delivered in Alberta. The COVID-19 outbreak has presented unique operational and governance challenges for public library service delivery.

In response, Alberta Municipal Affairs, Public Library Services Branch (PLSB) continues to explore and implement various measures to support library boards.

To assist library boards in complying with certain legislative requirements, PLSB offers a number of guidelines, outlined below. These guidelines will allow board meetings to be held in a manner that supports social distancing recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The guidelines will also ensure that library boards have flexibility when conducting meetings by electronic means, navigating quorum challenges due to board members in quarantine, as well as methods for providing information to the public.

During this period of uncertainty, it is important for boards to continue to fulfill their role as governors in the delivery of public library service. Just because the physical location is closed does not necessarily mean service to the community ceases. Boards need to continually reassess and be ready to make decisions, sometimes in very short order.

Now is a critical time for boards to meet and make decisions about:

- providing alternate forms of library service to the community, including individuals with disabilities or limited internet access
- potential impact on Plan of Service timelines
- adjusting the budget
- updating or developing policies around emergency planning
- implementing or creating a business continuity plan
- staffing, employment responsibilities

Did you know?

Public libraries in Alberta continue to offer services even while their physical locations are closed. These services include:

- e-content (such as ebooks and audiobooks)
- telephone services (to help people access e-content)
- curbside pick-up of books/CDs/DVDs
- access to Wi-Fi connectivity

Meetings by electronic means

As per section 33(1) of the *Libraries Act*, library boards “shall meet at least once every 4 months.” In addition, “[e]very meeting of a board is open to the public” (Libraries Regulation, Section 5(1)). PLSB will deem an electronic meeting to have met these requirements as long as:

- notice of the electronic meeting is provided and states the electronic means being used and gives the information necessary for the public to access the meeting;
- the public is able to hear the meeting as it is occurring;
- anybody entitled to make submissions before and during the meeting can do so by email or any other method the board considers appropriate; and
- the library manager is able to attend the meeting by electronic means (this does not mean they must attend, just that, if necessary, they are able to)

There are a variety of tools and methods that a library board may employ to meet these requirements. These tools include, but are not limited to:

Free Options

Some of these offer paid options with more features.

- Zoom
- Facebook Live
- Skype
- YouTube Live
- BlueJeans

Paid Options

Most of these offer free trials.

- GoToMeeting
- Zoho Meeting
- WebEx
- G Suite Hangouts Meet
- AnyMeeting

Where web- or video-conferencing is not feasible, boards may utilize teleconference technology, provided the requirements outlined above are met.

Did you know?

The *Read Alberta eBook Project* saw an 80% increase in ebook downloads from Feb to March alone and use is anticipated to increase over coming weeks/months. The *Read Alberta eBooks Project* (a partnership with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta) makes 2000 ebooks available and supports Alberta publishing businesses.

Information dissemination

It is very important at this time of uncertainty and separation for boards to operate in a transparent manner. Always endeavour to make public all the information you can so people know what decisions your board is making. Maintain a stance of openness to retain the trust and confidence of your council and your community.

Information should be made available to the public for public inspection. This can be achieved by making it electronically available on the library website. If requested, a board may also send the information to members of the public by email, mail, or fax.

Achieving quorum

If the board is unable to achieve quorum because of quarantine, quorum is constituted by the number of remaining board members who are not in quarantine, provided the number remaining is two or more. Instances of voluntary self-isolation are not considered quarantine.

Example: The Town of Anywhere Library Board has eight board members. Quorum is 50% of members, or four. Two board members have been quarantined. While they are quarantined, quorum may consist of 50% of the remaining six board members, or three.

Boards with members who are in voluntary self-isolation may opt to excuse those members from attending meetings as per section 31(1) of the *Libraries Act*. Quorum would remain the same.

Alignment with municipalities

Similar provisions have been enacted for municipalities through the *Meeting Procedures (COVID-19 Suppression) Regulation*. Thus, in following the above guidelines, library boards will be in step with their municipalities in conducting their business.

Did you know?

Libraries all across Alberta are responding to the current crisis in innovative ways. Libraries are offering virtual story times, Facebook Live dance lessons, telephone assistance for people navigating digital resources.

How is your library supporting the community at this time? Let us know so we can share the good news!

Further updates

PLSB is aware of the unique operational challenges library boards are facing at this unprecedented time. We will continue to examine ways to support library boards in navigating through this situation, and will provide further updates as new information and tools become available.

We also encourage board members to reach out to one another for knowledge and support. The provincial Public Library Network is made up of over 220 library boards provincewide, all currently facing the same challenging situation. Draw from this powerful collective to weather this storm.

Questions?

Contact the members of PLSB's Legislative Services Team as follows:

Peace region

Ken Allan

p: 780-641-9363 m: 780-292-2228

ken.allan@gov.ab.ca

Northern Lights region

Jordan DeSousa

p: 780-415-0295

jordan.desousa@gov.ab.ca

Yellowhead region

Miranda Maguire

p: 780-415-0296 m: 780-916-8038

miranda.maguire@gov.ab.ca

Parkland region

Ken Allan

p: 780-641-9363 m: 780-292-2228

ken.allan@gov.ab.ca

Marigold region

Miranda Maguire

p: 780-415-0296 m: 780-916-8038

miranda.maguire@gov.ab.ca

Shortgrass region

Jordan DeSousa

p: 780-415-0295

jordan.desousa@gov.ab.ca

Chinook Arch region

Jordan DeSousa

p: 780-415-0295

jordan.desousa@gov.ab.ca

Other regions and general legislative inquiries

Katrina Peachey

p: 780-638-1185

katrina.peachey@gov.ab.ca

Jen Anderson

p: 780-415-0294

jen.anderson@gov.ab.ca

Kerry Anderson

p: 780-415-0294 m: 780-720-0161

kerry.anderson@gov.ab.ca