

## Mohawk Valley Library System

### Board of Trustees Effectiveness Review

The MVLS Board of Trustees is responsible for creating and maintaining conditions that foster the successful implementation of the MVLS mission and vision statements. At the same time, the board ensures that the business of the system is conducted in a way that is open, transparent, ethical, and effective. Finally, the board is responsible for the long-term viability of system services for member libraries and the community at large.

Taking an interest in board effectiveness is every trustee's responsibility. Your goal should be to create an environment that will produce quality services for the community coupled with a mindset of continuous improvement.

**Instructions:** The following seven questions are designed to help begin your assessment of the MVLS board of trustees. Please work through this process on your own, rating your board in each of the seven areas. Please circle the appropriate number on the scale, or indicate Unknown or N/A. Please thoughtfully consider and make notes on the reasons for your choices, to inform the board's discussions on these questions. The full board will later do this exercise together and discuss the areas that may need to be improved. A conversation like this could be revealing and energizing.

#### Seven Areas to Consider in the Context of Your Board:

1. Are you providing valued benefit to your community?
  - As an MVLS trustee, you have been entrusted to manage the resources given to MVLS for provision of quality services for the member libraries and communities. Do the services MVLS provides match the needs of the various member libraries and communities?
  - Does MVLS have communication mechanisms in place for libraries to give input? Soliciting feedback from libraries is key to finding out what they need and what services might best suit their individual needs. Actively seeking input shows the community you care about what they want and allows you to shape services for the maximum number of people. Obtaining input from your community can happen in a variety of ways (focus groups, informal conversations, outreach to community groups, etc.) and should happen on a consistent and regular basis.

Indicate how MVLS services benefit the community of member libraries:						
Maximum Benefit	5	4	3	2	1	Minimum Benefit
Unknown			N/A			

2. Is MVLS well integrated into the services provided by member libraries?
- Providing excellent service to libraries is expected, but many trustees and staff of member libraries may not recognize the value that MVLS provides. MVLS needs to be a visible partner for member libraries. Working with libraries and other organizations, and being involved in library events, will raise your visibility and spread the good word about MVLS services. What kind of presence does MVLS have in the member libraries and the wider community?
  - Frequently, leaders in a position to champion MVLS are unfamiliar with system services and are unaware of the value you truly bring to member libraries and to the community. When asked if they know what their library system offers, many library stakeholders may need to be told what their library actually can access through MVLS; many are surprised. The board should consider how they are communicating with library and community leaders and what messages about MVLS will connect best.

Indicate how visible MVLS is to member libraries:						
Highly Visible	5	4	3	2	1	Not Visible
Unknown			N/A			

3. Does the board consider the philosophy of public libraries in all policies, plans and decisions?
- Public libraries are one of the most democratic institutions in America. Values such as a commitment to intellectual freedom, equity of access to information, and the confidentiality of patron records are the cornerstones of the American public library. The impact on these values should be a factor in all decisions.

Indicate how well your board integrates public library values into their work:						
Common Understanding & Integration of Values	5	4	3	2	1	Little Understanding & Integration of Values
Unknown			N/A			

4. Does MVLS have the capacity to carry out the mission and the plan?
- Do you have adequate personnel, materials, space, and funding to provide the services needed? Has the board recognized the areas that MVLS may be lacking in and proactively sought ways to expand capacity where needed? Has the board considered the organizational implications of growth?

- “Making do” is not necessarily what MVLS libraries and patrons are looking for. If MVLS strategic planning has identified desired services that MVLS can’t provide due to lack of personnel or funding, can we provide these services- either through resource reallocation, seeking additional funds, or some other creative, sustainable solution.

Indicate the capacity of MVLS to meet library needs:						
Adequate Capacity	5	4	3	2	1	Inadequate Capacity
Unknown						N/A

5. Is the board governing or managing?
- The board’s role is to create plans and policies, the implementation of those plans and policies is the role of the director. When boards are too involved at the “micro” level of system activities the true work of the board-that of building a viable and sustainable system for future generations-cannot be accomplished effectively or efficiently.

Indicate your board’s tendency:						
Governs	5	4	3	2	1	Manages
Unknown						N/A

6. Are your meetings well run?
- Is there an open atmosphere where board members feel they can freely ask questions? Do agendas, reports and documentation adequately prepare you for discussions and decision-making? In your meetings, are the above five areas referred to when discussing plans, policies and issues?

Indicate how well run your board meetings are:						
Well Run	5	4	3	2	1	Chaotic
Unknown						N/A

7. Does the board annually review the functioning of the organization, including the above 6 questions?
- Does the board routinely check on the progress being made on the goals and objectives laid out in the library's long-range plan? Are quantitative and qualitative metrics in place to indicate the success or failure of a service or program currently offered?
  - By periodically checking on the MVLS' progress you will have the chance to make course corrections, if you ignore the progress or status of a service, it is more apt to become stagnant or even irrelevant which works against getting the most out of MVLS services for member libraries.

Indicate the frequency with which the board reviews its progress:						
Reviewed within a year	5	4	3	2	1	Not reviewed this decade
Unknown	N/A					

Once you have identified areas for improvement, the board and the director should regularly assess progress to make sure you are moving the organization forward to meet the needs of your communities rather than just treading water. This step ties directly into the Executive Director review process. By working as a team to engage in regular board performance assessment you will become a stronger, more effective board while fulfilling your duty to craft public library system services that benefit your community.