Performance Evaluations

It is the duty of the board of a city library to evaluate the performance of the library director (33-2607[8]). It is the duty of the library director to evaluate the performance of every library staff member. All performance evaluations should be done in accordance with city policies and procedures. (If the city has passed an ordinance declaring that library employees are not city employees, evaluations should be done in accordance with whatever substitute policy the city or library has created for library employees.)

It is the duty of the board of a district library to evaluate the performance of the library director or director team (33-2720(1)(c)). It is the duty of the library director or director team to evaluate the performance of library staff members, based on the policies, procedures, and job descriptions created by the library board.

Some libraries conduct probationary evaluations for new employees after their first six months on the job. Whether or not this is your policy, each person in the library should have a performance evaluation by his or her immediate supervisor once every year. When you are conducting a performance evaluation, you are not evaluating the person; you are evaluating how well she or he does the job.

There should be two components to a job evaluation. The first is a written evaluation on how well the employee accomplishes all the different desired results of the job. The desired results should be spelled out in the job description. This evaluation should be written by the employee’s immediate supervisor. Both negative and positive evaluations should be explained in writing. Some libraries also have employees evaluate themselves in writing on their own success in achieving the desired results of the job. They then compare their self-evaluations with the evaluations of their supervisor.

The second part of the process is an interview between the supervisor and the employee about the written evaluation. This interview allows the employee to respond both positively and negatively to the written evaluation. If there are problems, the employee can talk about these and sometimes a mutually satisfying solution can be found. For example, a negative comment about an employee’s speed in performing a task might be explained by the employee as a result of poor equipment. If there is agreement on the issue, the written
evaluation should be amended. If there is disagreement, the employee should be allowed to tell her or his side of the story in writing, and this document should be placed in the employee’s file.

One common mistake that supervisors make in evaluating employees is to withhold the truth about problems, based on a desire “not to hurt their feelings.” This mistake has two negative results. First, it means that employees will not improve their performance, because no one has told them they are not meeting expectations. Second, if disciplinary action ever becomes necessary, this will be more difficult, as there will be no documentation of longstanding problems. It is more difficult to discipline employees who have never been informed of problems with their performance.

**Promotions**

Many libraries promote employees from within the organization before attempting to hire a new employee. If this is the case with your library, it should be explained in your personnel policy, and all current employees should be allowed to apply for the position.

It is important to design an internal recruitment policy for board approval. Before a library begins to recruit internally, there must be a plan specifying who needs to be involved in the process. It is the job of your library’s HR department to provide guidance for the internal recruitment process, but understanding who else needs to be included is crucial. Another key component of this plan is establishing clear communication rules for the internal hiring process. The policy must specify who can apply for internal vacancies and provide a template of what information must be provided in these internal postings, such as salary, benefits, department location. The posting should also specify how long an employee must be in his or her current position before applying for a new one. Do employees need to inform their current managers before applying for a new job? Can one department head encourage another department’s employee to apply for an open position? Questions such as these need to be considered when establishing the library's internal recruiting policy.

HR staff should educate managers and employees on internal recruitment to build awareness. If jobs are available, make them known to the staff. Direct employees to a specific Web page for job opportunities, send out e-mails to the entire staff, and advertise vacancies on the library's social media
accounts. Current employees will not apply if they do not know the need is there.

In order for internal hiring to work, managers and supervisors must engage their employees and push them to apply for open positions within the library. This means seeking out talented, qualified, and diverse applicants. If you know that a particular employee would be a great fit for another position, why not point this out to that employee and possibly help further advance his or her career? Employees are more likely to apply if they have the support of supervisors.

Bear in mind that you should always be careful that the employee you are promoting meets the minimum qualifications that you have listed on the job description for the position. Since the promotion is a reward for better-than-average service, you should also be able to document that the employee you are promoting has had better-than-average evaluations in the lower-level position. This is especially important if more than one employee has expressed an interest in being promoted to the higher position.

A good employee in one position or department doesn’t mean he or she is the right candidate for a different position or a different department, so screen internal applicants carefully. Talk with managers and supervisors for references. If permitted, look at an employee’s files to see the individual’s past employment and behavioral records.

As mentioned previously, any such internal promotion policy should be reviewed by your library’s attorney or risk management provider.

**Once again, when in doubt about HR issues, contact your library’s HR professional, attorney, and/or risk management provider.**
Progressive Discipline
Except in extreme cases, such as when someone has endangered library users or other staff members, the library should use a progressive discipline approach to employees who are having problems. One of the most important tools for preventing discipline problems is setting clear standards and expectations for performance – not only in what tasks should be accomplished and how they will be measured, but also our expectations of how we will treat each other and our library’s users.

A progressive discipline approach begins with relatively mild measures of discipline, and proceeds to more serious steps if the problem is not corrected. The dual emphasis of this approach is on communication and on giving the errant employee a chance to improve. Some typical steps in progressive discipline are as follows:

- **Informal discussion.** The supervisor discusses the problem with the employee informally, trying to understand the problem and reach a mutually acceptable solution.

- **Oral warning.** The supervisor warns the employee that his or her behavior is unacceptable, and that if improvements are not made other actions will be taken.

- **Written reprimand.** The supervisor writes a formal reprimand, copies of which are sent to the employee and the supervisor’s superior. The reprimand describes the problem and consequences that might occur if the problem is not corrected. The reprimand is placed in the employee’s file. At this point, there may also be some outside intervention from the supervisor’s superior. The existence of a written reprimand in the file would mean that no merit raise would be warranted for that time period.

- **Suspension.** The employee is sent home for a specific period of time. She or he is not paid for the time missed. The employee should be afforded notice of the allegations and an opportunity to be heard prior to suspension without pay. A note explaining the action is placed in the employee’s file.

- **Termination.** The employee is fired. The reasons for the firing are documented and placed in the file, along with a summary of the history of the progressive discipline process.
Whenever the progressive discipline process reaches a point where specific potential consequences are presented to the employee, it is advisable to discuss the situation with your attorney or risk management provider.