

MEMORANDUM

TO: Flathead County Library Trustees

FROM: ImagineIF Library Foundation Board

DATE: February 24, 2022

RE: RESPONSE TO CURRENT LIBRARY EVENTS

The ImagineIF Library Foundation Board works to support and enhance patron services at our public libraries. The best way to do that is to work closely with library leadership and Trustees towards ensuring the highest standards in public library services, programs, collections, and staff.

Our Foundation mission does not require us to support actions or decisions by the Board of Trustees that inhibit or degrade library services.

In the past six months, the Foundation Board has been increasingly disappointed by a series of non-unanimous board decisions, and individual board conduct has damaged the reputation and capacity of ImagineIF Libraries.

They are identified as follows:

Undermining professional librarianship

- Hiring staff that does not meet common, desired standards of education or experience.
- Disregarding the professional advice of library staff.
- Expressing doubt about the value of professional librarianship.

Decreasing funds for operations

- A Director hire that will cost our libraries State aid and potential capital grant funds.
- Voluntarily reducing the budget for salaries without re-allocating salary savings

Failing in the duties of transparency, good governance and adherence to policy

- Seeking to bar library staff from attending Trustee meetings.
- Violating personnel policy while investigating a citizen complaint about staff.
- Violating open meeting laws.
- Seeking to amend policy in order to make decisions regarding collections that conflict with the ethical standards of public libraries and invite lawsuits.
- Making public statements about pending Board decisions on materials challenges.
- Back-channel strategizing and direct collusion with elected officials aimed at restricting access to materials or entire collections, as described in the Flathead Beacon article.

These decisions jeopardize patron access to professional staff, quality collections and exemplary programming.

Beyond the threat to our mission, these actions make our work harder as we strive to deliver adequate facilities to Bigfork and beyond.

Reputational damage to ImagineIF harms our ability to effectively fundraise and promote the positive impact of public libraries, and **we're already feeling the fallout.**

In December, a handful of donors stated they're canceling or holding back year-end gifts because they're troubled by some of the Trustee behaviors described, and another handful of Bigfork donors have expressed an unwillingness to fulfill their pledge commitments until Trustee mismanagement ceases.

In short, **this mismanagement makes our work harder.** Foundation staff and volunteers spend more time responding to donor and supporter complaints and questions than promoting our libraries, forming partnerships and raising funds.

Our donors support the mission and core values of ImagineIF Libraries as stated in the 2018-2022 strategic plan - providing connection, education and economic development to our community through kindness, courage, curiosity, diversity and encouraging personal transformation through knowledge.

If the vision for library services changes, the donor commitment to and support for the library will also change. The best way to ensure community support is for us to work closely with library leadership and Trustees toward ensuring the highest standards in public services, programs, collections, and staff.

Advocating FOR our libraries is our shared responsibility. Vibrant public libraries are directly correlated to vibrant communities. The ImagineIF Foundation and its supporters understand this. We need Library Trustees who do too.