



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Toronto Public Library Board – Self-Evaluation: 2022 Results

**Date:** January 23, 2023

**To:** Toronto Public Library Board

**From:** City Librarian

#### **SUMMARY**

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The purpose of this report is to present the results of the Toronto Public Library Board Self-Evaluation 2022 to the Board for approval. This is the seventh year that the Board has conducted the survey as a best practice in Board governance. Nine of ten Board members completed the survey in 2022. The survey asks Board members to evaluate the Board's Governance Role, Integrity and Ethics, Strategy Development, Teamwork, Advocacy and Communication and to rate the Board's overall value and efficacy. In the past two years, it has also included questions related to Board understanding of and response to COVID-19 issues.

Overall, respondents generally agreed that the Board adds value and is operating efficiently. No major issues were identified requiring action. In particular, there was strong agreement that plans and initiatives approved by the Board demonstrate value for money, and that Board discussions are guided by the best interests of Toronto Public Library (TPL). Board members provided

comments towards improvement in several areas, including related to advocacy and topics for future Board education topics.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:**

1. receives the results of the Board self-evaluation survey in Attachment 1; and
2. directs staff to conduct a survey in 2023.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The recommendations have no additional financial impacts beyond what is included in the City staff recommended 2023 operating budget for Toronto Public Library.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

At its meeting on January 24, 2022, the Board approved the report *Toronto Public Library Toronto Public Library Board – Self-Evaluation: 2021 Results* <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2022/jan24/16-tplb-self-evaluation-survey-2021-results-combined.pdf> and directed staff to conduct a survey in 2022, the final year of the current Board's term.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

In keeping with Toronto Public Library Board's Procedural By-Law and requirements of the Public Libraries Act, the Library Board held four open meetings by tele/video conference and five open hybrid meetings in 2022, fulfilling its governance role.

New technology to support hybrid meetings was installed last year and, beginning in May 2022, TPL board meetings were conducted in a hybrid model.

In the hybrid model, some or all members of the Board, library staff, guests and members of the public can attend and/or participate in the meeting either in person (in the boardroom at the Toronto Reference Library) or by tele/video conference. Recordings of board meeting proceedings are also now made available on the TPL website, following each board meeting.

Goals of the Board self-evaluation are to:

- determine the degree of alignment and agreement by Board members on TPL's mandate, mission, vision and strategic directions;
- identify gaps in knowledge and expertise to be addressed through Board education and orientation;
- identify improvements that promote effective board preparation, meeting and communications; and
- ensure effective governance and informed decision-making by supporting strong Board dynamics.

## COMMENTS

Nine out of ten Board members completed the Board self-evaluation survey in 2022. The strongest and most unanimous statements were:

- The Board reviews the annual audited financial statements and takes action where necessary
- The Board understands and contributes to the mandate, vision, and mission of the Library
- Board discussions are guided by the best interests of the Library and the public it serves
- Conflicts of interest are declared and effectively addressed

There was least agreement on the following statements:

- The Board's meeting agenda reflects a strategic vs. an operational focus
- All members fulfill their role and responsibility and at meetings have an opportunity to contribute equally to Board discussion
- The Board avails itself of external advice or opinion when needed

The statement with least agreement, "All members fulfill their role and responsibility and at meetings have an opportunity to contribute equally to Board discussion," is a two-part question and may benefit from further clarification and exploration. Future iterations of the survey may separate these

into two separate questions to better understand the issue and identify possible improvements.

Compared with last year's report, the overall satisfaction was largely unchanged (72% overall rating in 2022 vs. 78% in 2021). There was an overall improvement in the Board's evaluation of the area of governance and advocacy.

Comments from Board members highlight some common thoughts. The Board has a high regard for its ethical conduct. The Board reported that they were kept well-informed of post-COVID challenges at the Library. Board members would like members to come better prepared to meetings and to attend more regularly. Some members would like more information about the Library and its operations and services; an information package or tours may be beneficial considering the possibility of turnover in 2023.

Some members feel it would be beneficial for them to conduct outside research to bring to meetings and to capitalize on their own skillsets, as Board members come from diverse backgrounds. Some members expressed a desire for more engagement with staff and programs in-person. The Board also expressed a desire for more opportunities for advocacy work on behalf of the Library.

## **Next steps**

It is recommended that the Board direct staff to conduct a Board self-evaluation in 2023.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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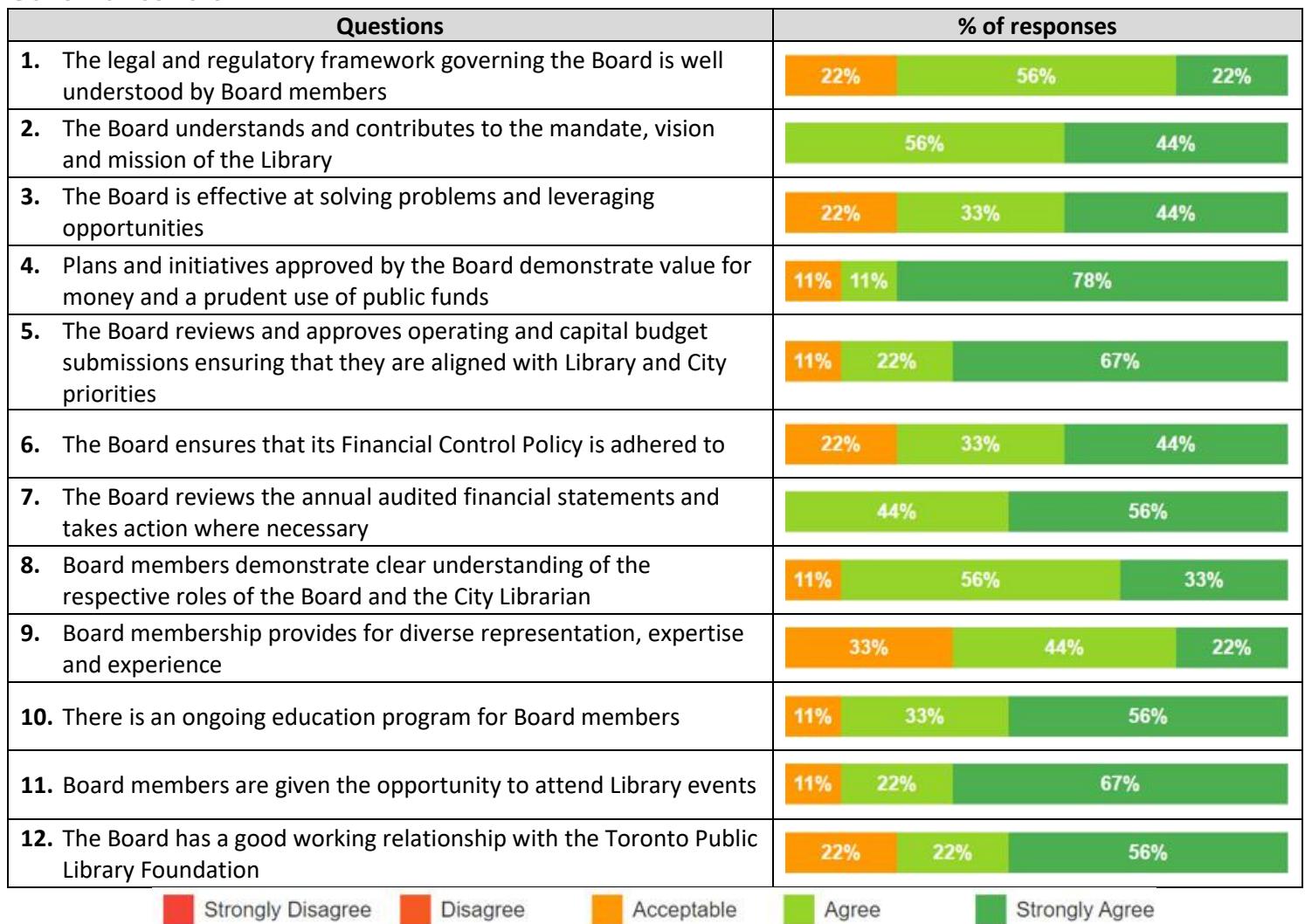
Vickery Bowles  
City Librarian

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: 2022 TPL Board Self-Evaluation Survey Results

## 2022 TPL Board Self-Evaluation Survey Results

### Governance role

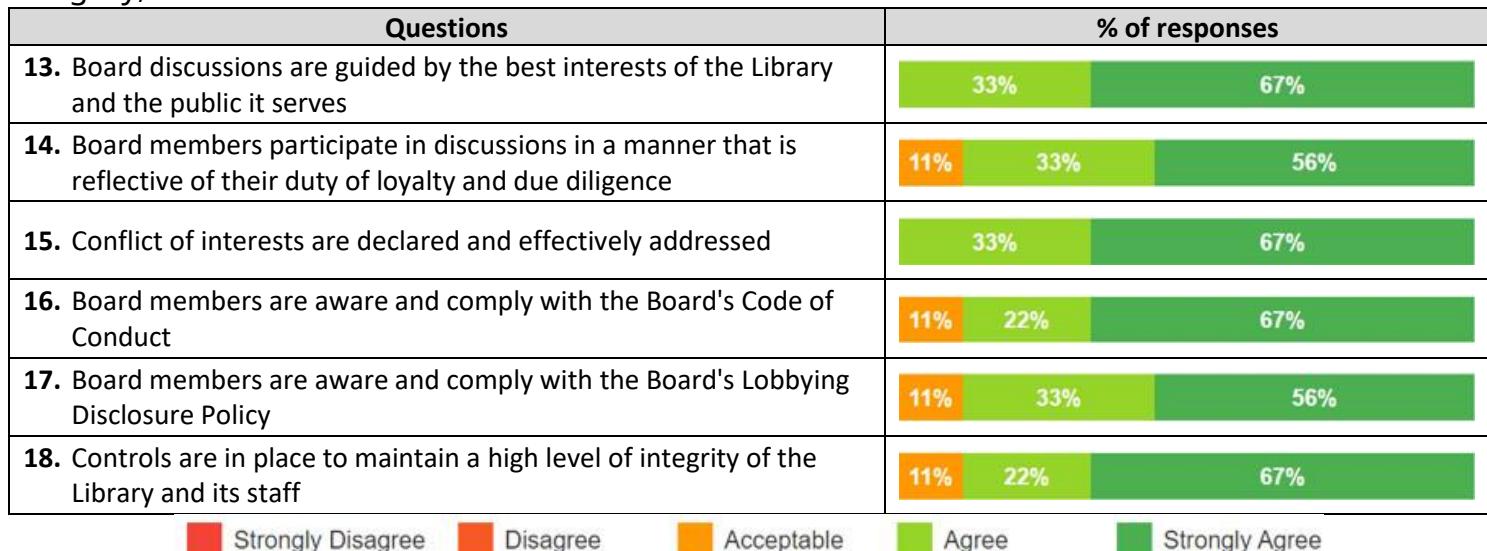


 Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Acceptable  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree

### Comments on the Board's governance role:

- It is wonderful that Board members can now attend event in person! I think we have all missed those opportunities!

## Integrity, ethics and values



 Strongly Disagree   
  Disagree   
  Acceptable   
  Agree   
  Strongly Agree

## Comments on the Board's integrity, ethics and values:

- The City staff brief the Board on our responsibility regarding Code of Conduct and the Lobbying Disclosure Policy which is very helpful, especially to new Board members. Given the amount of potential turnover for 2023, this will be much needed.

## Strategy development and performance monitoring:

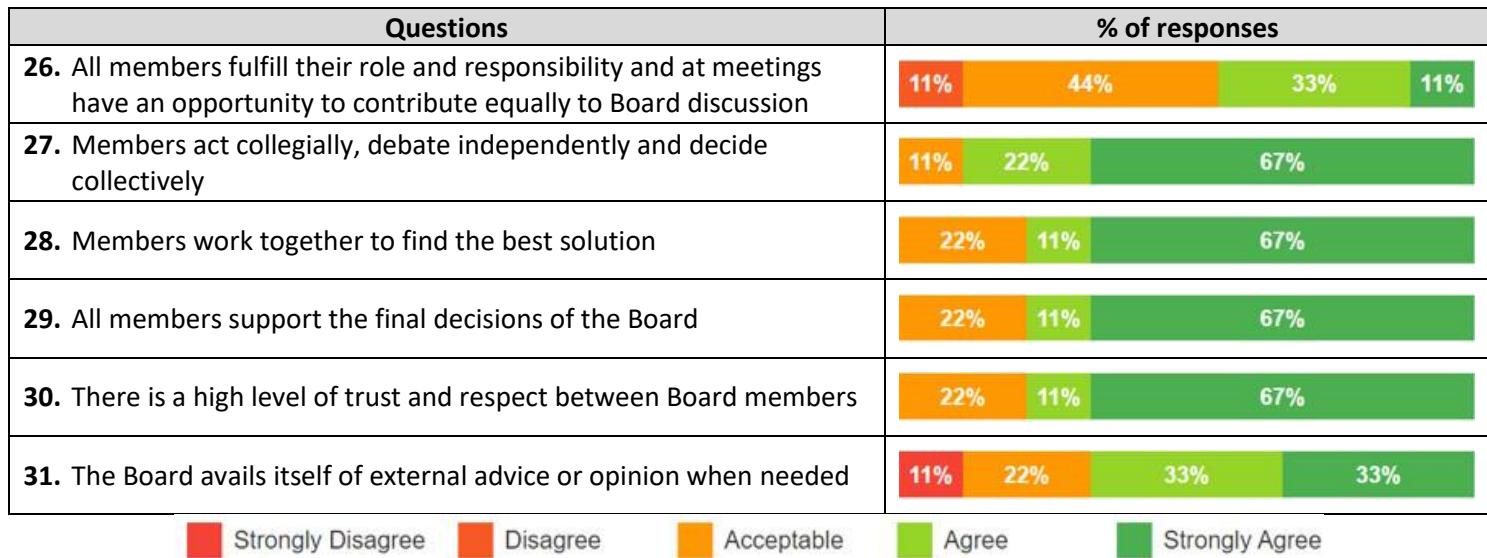


 Strongly Disagree   
  Disagree   
  Acceptable   
  Agree   
  Strongly Agree

## Comments on the Board's strategy development and performance monitoring:

- Whether or not it's a good thing, the board usually relies of staff to bring up strategic issues
- It is very impressive that the 2 ½ years of COVID, TPL was able to pivot substantially to meet changing needs whilst still managing to attain goals set in the Strategic Plan completely unrelated to COVID.

## Teamwork and collaboration:

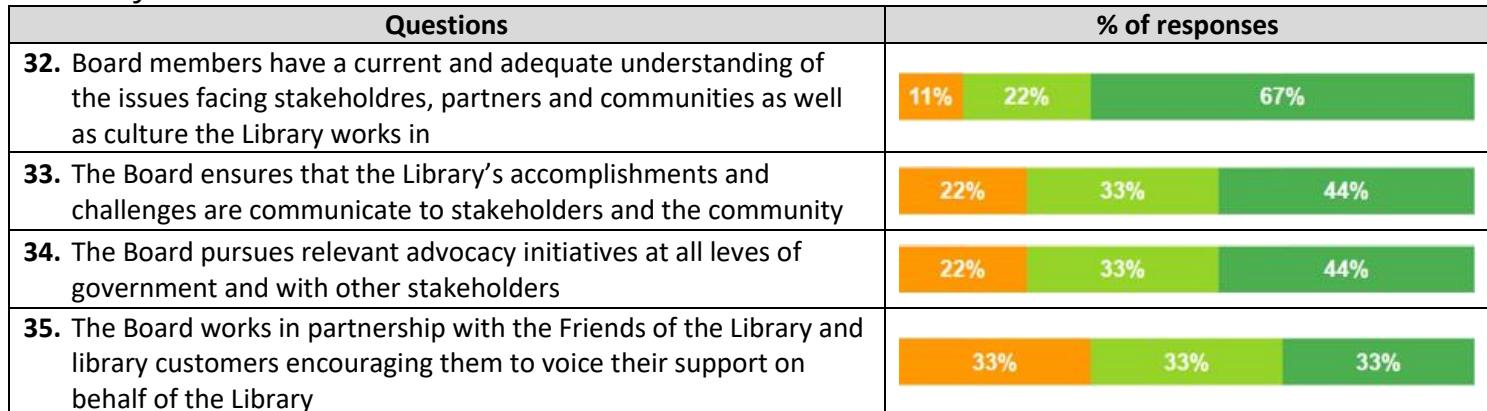


 Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Acceptable  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree

## Comments on the Board's teamwork and collaboration:

- Based on some conversations at meetings, not every member reads all the information provided. We must remember it is our responsibility to be fully prepared. If it's every necessary, the board should feel comfortable seeking external advice or legal opinions as needed without going through staff.
- Unfortunately I have found that with the virtual meetings, not all Board members prepare for the meetings. The staff ensure we have the materials but they are not always read. I also struggle with the attendance of some Board members. I strongly encourage in person and hope that the Public Appointments Committee stresses this to prospective new Board members.

## Advocacy and communication:

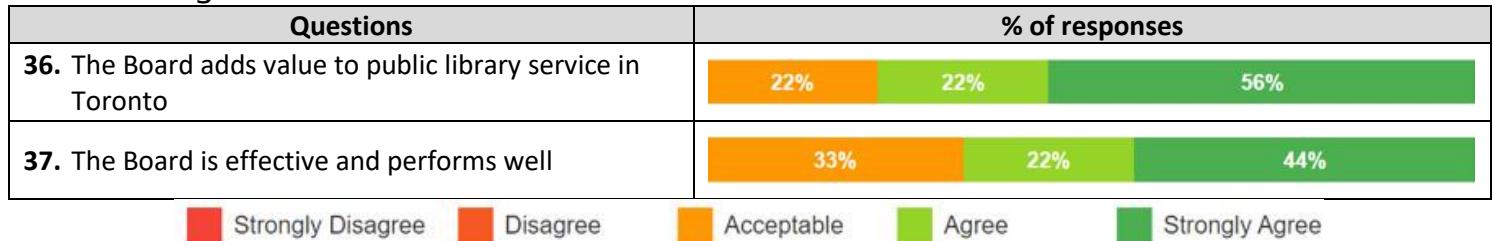


 Strongly Disagree  
  Disagree  
  Acceptable  
  Agree  
  Strongly Agree

## Comments on the Board's advocacy and communication:

- Advocacy frameowrk and roles could be stronger
- The Board is increasingly playing a stronger role in terms of advocacy than in the past and I believe this is a good value add for TPL and the staff.
- I feel there could be more that the Board could do to celebrate and advocate both with the public and with government. That said, do I have specific ideas? No, but I suspect our councilor members might have ideas.

## Overall rating:



## Comments on the Board's overall rating:

- Since joining I think the board fulfills its core responsibilities, but could do more for the library by taking advantage of our individual expertise.
- The varying perspectives of the Board members add value to TPL--both in terms of skills, knowledge and diversity. This can be further strengthened by reviewing needed skills and ensuring full participation by Board members.

## Board's understanding of challenges post-COVID (e.g. staffing, labour relations, finance, etc.):

- Many staff took retirement packages or were laid off and hiring has been difficult as hire from within has meant openings in a chain down the line. There have been ongoing staff shortages, but I think remaining staff are working hard to continue library service. I understand there are ongoing legal issues with the Covid layoffs, but not much has been communicated on that. Updates on Covid response and budget changes were frequent and thorough, and the library has been doing everything it can to resume service levels. Pivot to online programming has been amazing and has seen many people join from around the world.
- Very strong thanks to frequent and thorough updates from the City Librarian and staff.
- I think the board has a good understanding of the challenges post-COVID. The Board has been kept abreast of the changes, including the latest with the change in direction for those not vaccinated. It is highly complex and ever changing. The staff have done an excellent job in keeping the Board well informed and ensuring we know prior to changes being communicated publicly.
- Received an excellent update from Vickery last meeting regarding our post-covid challenges. yep, we have challenges.

## Areas of Board excellence:

- Areas of Board excellence: Very strong leadership in Sue. Have done well with online and hybrid. Councillor Perks ideas about safety and the task force that came out of that was really good.
- The Board members have varying skill sets which contribute to a good discussions about key issues.
- I think our understanding of the dividing lines of responsibility are good as I am not seeing the sort of micromanaging activity that I have seen on other boards. probably a lot of that is due to the excellent steering of Vickery. It is a respectful Board, in my opinion. Both of staff (and whyever not, honestly) and of each other.

## Areas where the Board could do better:

- Meeting preparation.
- I believe it is very important that the new Board attend meetings in person. For a board to function effectively, it is important that individuals get to know each other, learn from each other. This, I think is best accomplished by meeting in person rather than by webex.
- Some of us are better at consuming materials pre-meeting and asking the difficult questions. I, myself am not a champ in this...I mean, I do the reading and prepare, but much of the time, I feel well-briefed and so actually do not have that many questions to pose at the meetings.

## Suggestions for improvement:

- More engagement directly with staff. All programs I have helped with have been virtual, would be nice to go back to an in-person chance to interact with staff.

- This is a suggestion for staff. Board education sessions in general are good, but frankly some of what is covered should already be known and fully understood by all board members. Please give us materials to read about certain topics and trust (with support from the chair) that we can learn about these topics on our own. This would save time in meetings and help us focus the discussion on important questions and nuances.
- The survey is very helpful as a tool.
- see last comment

Please identify potential topics for future Board education sessions:

- How you purchase books. How the sorting centers and transport between libraries work. How you run enterprise projects (new buildings).
- Best practices in board governance from other major libraries and other City institutions. Key trends facing public libraries today. How municipal and provincial politics impact the TPL.
- Further exploration of CreateTO and branch redevelopment working more closely.
- I really wouldn't mind some brainstorming on how we could trumpet our triumphs to a broader audience