Every library board should familiarize itself with the requirements of the Massachusetts Public Employees Collective Bargaining Law, whether its employees are unionized or not. If your employees are unionized, you must become aware of your duties and responsibilities under the law. If your employees are not unionized, the law may help you to understand what every employee has a right to expect.

For more information regarding Massachusetts Public Employees Collective Bargaining Law, contact the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations at (617) 626-7132 for the Boston office or (413) 784-1230 for the Springfield office, or visit their website at http://www.mass.gov/lwd/labor-relations/. General information on workers’ rights is available through the Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General's Fair Labor Division, and can be viewed on their website at http://www.mass.gov/ago/doing-business-in-massachusetts/workplace-rights/.

A WORD ABOUT VOLUNTEERS

The temptation to rely on volunteers is almost overwhelming for the small library just a few steps from its volunteer beginnings, and for the larger library seeking ways to cut costs. Volunteers constitute an important community resource for many public libraries. When a program is developed, it should be with the understanding that the use of qualified volunteers in a library program is a supplement to, not a substitute for, paid staff.

Volunteers usually come to the library on an individual basis and participate in ongoing work or special projects within the library setting. Their tasks should be of genuine significance and should enhance the services and capabilities of the library. Volunteers can be advocates for the library within the community.

Libraries should not undertake a volunteer program unless the library board and the director are committed to the concept and are willing to devote the necessary time to develop a program that is well managed and will benefit the library. It is easy to underestimate the amount of time and energy it takes to manage library volunteers. But a successful volunteer program is well worth the effort.
Successful volunteer programs are:

- Planned and approved by staff and board
- Run under best employment practices - training, evaluation and development are important to volunteers
- Clear about work descriptions, the status of the volunteers and the expectations, including regular hours and consistent service and supervision
- Realistic in expectations of hours donated, types of work to be done and training required
- Clear about technicalities, such as insurance, use of library vehicles, paid expenses for library-related activities
- Open to the community, but on the basis of specific job descriptions and capabilities of volunteers to fill the jobs
- Mindful of the need for recognition and appreciation of volunteer work

Volunteers can be extraordinarily useful in libraries. The possibilities are almost limitless: working with outreach programs, presenting film programs, storytelling, teaching literacy classes, collecting historical material, planning and creating exhibits, delivering materials to the homebound, writing press releases, planning the oral history project, taking pictures, taking surveys, acting as hosts and hostesses at programs, working with senior citizen groups, taking books to convalescent homes and hospitals, shelving returned materials, and more.
Libraries should have a policy covering the use of volunteer labor which should include the concepts that the use of volunteers is temporary pending ability to employ staff, and that volunteers should not supplant or replace established staff positions (see chapter 4 for more information on policies). Trustees and directors must be knowledgeable about possible restrictions or regulations concerning the use of volunteers that may be affected by personnel policies or union contracts. Also be aware that library volunteers may be subject to Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) checks. Contact your municipal counsel for advice on these issues specific to your community.

Trustee Tip

Has your board adopted a policy for volunteers? Are there procedures in place for managing the volunteer program? The Massachusetts Library System has sample volunteer policies in their Policy Collection: http://guides.masslibsystem.org/c.php?g=570298&p=3930840.