

Public Library Board Meetings and Remote Participation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public library boards in Ontario are looking at ways to hold meetings when the libraries are closed to the public and gatherings are not recommended.

Remote participation - In mid-March 2020, the Ontario legislature passed [Bill 187](#), *An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the City of Toronto Act, 2006*, to allow electronic participation in municipal council meetings during an emergency in that the participants coming into a meeting would count for quorum and have the right to vote on any issue. However, public library boards operate under their own legislation, the [Public Libraries Act](#), and within this framework, have been allowed remote participation into board meetings for many years, with participating board members counting for quorum and having a vote on any issue.

Open Meetings - The [Public Libraries Act](#), like the *Municipal Act*, specifies requirements for open meetings to ensure that most business is conducted transparently, and with access for and in view of the public. In usual situations, this means that a library board meeting is set for a public location, with the public in attendance in the room and all board members at the table (although one or two could come in remotely). In these unusual situations, library board can be held electronically. However, such meetings would still be required to follow existing meeting rules including providing of notice of meetings to the public, maintaining meeting minutes, and continue to be open to the public.

Closed (In-camera) Meetings - [Section 16.1](#) (4) (5) of the *Public Libraries Act* has not changed and continues to specify when a meeting can be closed to the public (*e.g.* to deal with personnel matters or litigation). Such meetings may be closed to the public and may be held remotely.

Points to remember for library board meetings held electronically

- The technology used for the meeting must enable verification of the identity of each participating board member and allow for live, real time board meeting participation. Technologies such as web/video applications (*e.g.*, Zoom or Skype) would be fine, and the participants can choose to use the video/audio component, the computer audio only or call in through the supplied telephone number. Using a teleconference service (*e.g.*, Intercall) is fine, but each speaker would need to identify themselves before speaking during the meeting. However, e-mail would not be fine as one cannot verify the identity of the sender is the board member nor does it enable live, real time participation. Live streaming does not allow for public participation.
- The meeting must be advertised to the public ahead of time (by e-mail or social media and on the library website). The notice must provide instructions for the public on how to join the meeting.
- The public must be enabled to interact with board members and to ask questions in real-time, even in a moderated fashion such as through a comments or chat function.
- The agenda for such a meeting becomes crucial. It is always best practice to share the agenda ahead of the meeting. To ensure proper flow of the meeting, it is wise to have a specific point in the agenda for public delegations or presentations. It may also help to leave in-camera items until the end, giving the public attendees notice at the outset that this will be occurring, or better still, best to hold two meetings – one regular (with the public) and one closed (without the public).