



Denver Public Library

Commissioner Orientation Handbook 2025






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WELCOME FROM THE CITY LIBRARIAN

Thank you for serving as a Denver Public Library Commissioner. On behalf of the current Commission and library staff, I welcome you and look forward to a successful and rewarding relationship.

The information contained in this handbook is an important part of your orientation. In it, you'll learn about the library's governance and operations, as well as getting an overview of our mission, vision and values.

As a Commissioner, you serve as the library's advocate and steward of a beloved public institution. Our customers, City officials and library staff put their trust in you to help keep this organization strong.

I am profoundly grateful to each of you for your belief in the library and its mission. With your valuable time and commitment, the Denver Public Library will continue to be a respected and cherished part of our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Jeske". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michelle" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Jeske".

Michelle Jeske
City Librarian and Executive Director

COMMISSIONER BASICS



THE COMMISSIONER IN THE COMMUNITY

Library Commissioners play an important role in shaping the public image of the library. They are among the library's most influential representatives in the community. The effective Commissioner will:

- Articulate the library's mission
- Keep the lines of communication open between the Commissioners, the City Librarian, the community, and local government officials
- Maintain a positive relationship with the Library Friends Foundation
- Understand community needs, library capabilities, and the necessity to plan carefully for future library services
- Never miss an opportunity to build goodwill for the library
- Understand the social, legal and political context in which the library exists
- Participate in local and statewide advocacy, stressing the importance of public libraries in today's information-rich society

FOUNDATION FOR THE COMMISSION

Article 20 of the Colorado Constitution confers on municipal citizens the right to adopt a home rule charter, thereby providing local control for their municipal government.

Therefore, the Denver Public Library (DPL) Commission exists, which derives its authority from the Charter of the City and County of Denver:

- **COMMISSION CREATED:** There shall be a Library Commission, consisting of eight members, who shall serve without compensation and shall be appointed by the Mayor.
- **GENERAL POWERS:** The commission shall have exclusive control of the public library, branches thereof and reading rooms, of all money appropriated therefor, of all property or money otherwise acquired for such purposes, of the acquisition by purchase, construction, or lease, of grounds and buildings for such purposes; of the administration of gifts and trusts, and power to do any and all things necessary or expedient in connection with library purposes.
- **OPEN SHELF SYSTEM:** The library and its branches shall, as far as practicable, be conducted upon the open shelf system.
- **ANNUAL REPORTS:** The commission shall make an annual report to the Mayor, stating the condition of its trust, the various sums of money received from the library fund and other sources, and for what purposes such sums of money have been expended; the number of books and periodicals on hand, the number added by purchase or gift, the number lost or missing and the general character of such books, the number of visitors, and such other information as may be deemed of general interest.

Denver's full municipal code can be found at:

<https://www.municode.com/library/co/denver>

ROLE OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission provides the means for the library to operate through financial control and by setting performance expectations through approving policies and strategic plans. The Commission works to set the standards and goals they want to meet for the good of the taxpayer.

Their employee, the City Librarian and Executive Director, is in charge of the ways those standards and goals are met. She employs and directs all other staff, makes choices about how to spend money appropriated in the budget, oversees the physical facilities and creates and administers procedures for the daily operation of the library.

POLICY: The Commission adopts governing policies for the library, which are written statements designed to guide decisions.

STRATEGIC PLAN: The Commission reviews and approves long range plans for the future of the library based on its mission

FISCAL OVERSIGHT: The Commission approves the annual budget which sets the stage for the operation of the library and practices responsible fiscal management of the public money

NETWORKING: Commission members build relationships in the community with other leaders, showing the importance of being a library lover through their visibility in the community

ADVOCATES: The Commission promotes library services and supports library issues on the local, state and national levels

MARKETING: The Commission carries out the mission statement of the library by promoting programs, services and future plans in the community

COMMISSION MEETINGS: Commission members prepare for, attend, and participate in all Commission meetings, ready to discuss the issues on the agenda

DIRECTOR RELATIONSHIP: The Commission employs a highly qualified City Librarian and Executive Director, empowers them to manage the day-to-day operation of the library, and evaluates their performance annually



ROLE OF THE CITY LIBRARIAN

ADMINISTRATION: The City Librarian works with the division chiefs who form the Executive Leadership Team to guide and make decisions about the direction of the library.

POLICY: The City Librarian advises the Commission on policies to handle specific library issues

PROCEDURES: The City Librarian determines what is actually done to fulfill the intent of the Commission's policies

STRATEGIC PLAN: The City Librarian coordinates the planning process and administers annual objectives

FINANCE: The City Librarian works with the Chief of Operations and the Director of Finance to draft the annual budget and makes recommendations to the Commissioners for approval

NETWORKING: The City Librarian participates in community events and networks for the benefit of the library

MARKETING: The City Librarian oversees the library's public relations and marketing plans

COMMISSION MEETINGS: The City Librarian provides a Commission packet with explanations of agenda items to prepare the Commissioners for decision making

PERSONNEL: The City Librarian makes hiring and evaluation decisions or delegates such to other library leaders

GOLDEN RULES FOR COMMISSIONERS

- Govern, don't manage. Leave the actual management of the library to the City Librarian
- Make your position on issues clear; vote your conscience and agree to support majority decisions, even if they differ from your opinion
- Observe ethical standards with absolute truth, integrity, and honor, and disqualify yourself immediately whenever the appearance of a conflict of interest exists
- Customer complaints are the responsibility of the City Librarian and their staff. Continued dissatisfaction should be reviewed at the Commission meeting only if policy revision is necessary or legal ramifications are involved
- Participate in continuing education opportunities
- Participate in fundraising efforts
- Keep an open mind... and a sense of humor

BYLAWS

Commissioner bylaws provide a structure for Commission operations. They include terms of office, election of officers, quorum attendance at meetings, voting, and govern other aspects of the Commission's internal affairs. Some of the bylaws are covered in this booklet. You will be provided the full document with your orientation.

COLORADO LIBRARY LAWS

Colorado Library Laws (CRS 24-90-101 et seq) provides a legal framework for library operations and responsibilities. Staff, governing commission and agency attorneys who work with libraries should be familiar with this information. Colorado Statutes can be viewed at <https://leg.colorado.gov/>

Colorado has one of the strictest privacy laws in the country. Our Library Commission has adopted a Privacy policy and a Collection Development policy. The latter policy includes selection criteria for a variety of library materials, popular and unpopular, and a procedure for reconsideration of materials in the event of a challenge.

The Colorado State Library has also created a website with links to many detailed and valuable summary documents on Colorado library law:
www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/LibraryLaw/Index.htm



EFFECTIVE COMMISSION MEETINGS

BEFORE THE MEETING

Bring issues that you want covered to the attention of the Commission President and/or City Librarian before the meeting so that the issue can be placed on the agenda, and so library staff can have full and accurate answers for the entire Commission.

Review the entire Commission packet. Packets typically include an agenda, previous meeting minutes, staff and financial reports, and documents related to business listed on the agenda.

MEETING FOCUS

The most effective Commissions concentrate their time and energy on a few issues that will have a major impact on the library's future. Remember to stick to the agenda and respect each other's time.

ATTENDANCE & QUORUM

Regular attendance at Commission and committee meetings is essential to make the best possible decision when it comes time to vote.

The Commission president and City Librarian should be notified in advance if attendance is not possible.

A quorum is the minimum number of Commissioners required in attendance for the Commission to conduct business. A meeting at which four members are present may transact business, conditional upon written approval of a majority of the Commission within ten days of the meeting.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules of conduct at meetings allowing everyone an opportunity to be heard and to make decisions with minimum confusion. This means democratic rule, flexibility, protection of rights and a fair hearing for everyone. So, it is important that everyone knows the basic rules.

The Library Commission uses Robert's Rules of Order as its code and the rules can be found online at <http://www.rulesonline.com/>

DECISION MAKING

After Commission deliberation, decisions are made by a Commissioner majority and not necessarily unanimous agreement.

Once the Commission makes a decision, individual Commissioners are professionally bound to support the decision publicly, even though they might not necessarily agree with the decision. When it comes to Library Commission decisions, all Commissioners should speak with one voice.

OPEN MEETINGS

Public business must be conducted in public.

The City and County of Denver has an open meeting requirement per Denver Municipal Code Chapter 2, Article 3. Full Commission meetings are open to the public. Please see Municipal Code section Article 3, Sec. 2-34 for details.

- <https://www.municode.com/library/co/denver>

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A limited number of specific topics may, under Denver Municipal Code, be discussed in an Executive Session that is not open to the public. No formal action, adoption, or resolution may occur in the executive session.

Reasons for entering into an Executive Session include but are not limited to:

- Legal advice
- Purchase, sale, or lease of property
- Matters that are required to be kept confidential by law
- Specialized details of security arrangements or investigations
- Personnel matters [Must name individual]



THE PUBLIC AT MEETINGS

Commission meetings are held for the conduct of library business. They are not public hearings about library affairs. Though not mandated by law, libraries should have a time at meetings for the public to express themselves. At DPL Commission meetings members of the public are allotted three minutes to speak, unless there are more speakers than the agenda allows.

The Commission President should control the period for public expression and must consistently adhere to all rules governing the public's participation at meetings.

Do not answer questions or get into debates, as this time should be reserved for the public to share their thoughts on library issues. Refer issues to staff for any appropriate follow-up.

MEETING MINUTES

Minutes are a record or summary of all motions, proposals, resolutions and any matter formally voted upon. It does not need to be a transcript.

- Minutes must include a record of the vote of all members on all matters voted upon.
- Commission meeting minutes are kept as a permanent record.

ABOUT THE LIBRARY

In June 1889, City Librarian John Cotton Dana established Denver's first public library in a wing of Denver High School. He referred to it as a "center of public happiness." In 1910, the city opened a Central Library, funded by Andrew Carnegie, located in downtown's Civic Center Park. Between 1913 and 1920, Carnegie also underwrote construction of the city's first eight branch libraries. They would serve a city that had previously relied on traveling trunks of books.

The "Old Main" library in Civic Center Park served downtown Denver for 45 years, until the City opened a new library in 1956. The new structure provided more than twice the space of the Carnegie building and a string of new branch libraries opened to serve sprawling neighborhoods to the southeast and southwest. By the late 1980s, library collections had outgrown the Main Library and most branch libraries. In 1990, voters approved a \$91.6 million bond issue to build a new Central Library and renovate, expand or build new branch library buildings. A 540,000 square-foot Central Library, designed by world-renowned architect Michael Graves, opened in 1995.

In 2007, Denver voters supported a bond issue that enabled Denver Public Library to build three new branch libraries in newly developed and underserved areas of the city: Green Valley Ranch, Central Park, and West Denver.

The Elevate Denver bond election was supported by voters in 2017, which provided \$69.3 million for a major renovation of the Central Library and 10 branch locations.

In 2021, Denver voters passed the RISE bond which included three library projects. The RISE bond includes funding for the Denver Public Library to construct two new branch libraries, in the Globeville and Westwood neighborhoods, and an expansion project for the Hampden Branch Library. These neighborhoods were identified as needing additional library services in the Denver Public Library's 2017 Facilities Master Plan. All three projects are currently in various planning stages.

In November 2022, Denver voters once again said "yes" to the library and passed measure 2i, which established the DPL Fund, providing the library with an additional \$37 million a year. This additional funding allows the library to more fully meet the evolving needs of the community. With this fund, DPL is focused on expanding service to the community by expanding hours at branch locations, increasing staff, improvements to facilities, and expanding and diversifying the library collection. Updates on library investments through Strong Library, Strong Denver, supported by the DPL Fund are available regularly on the website.

Additional historic and current library information can be found on our website and the annual report also contains up-to-date material on library services, programs and statistical measures.

MISSION

Together, we create welcoming spaces where all are free to explore and connect.

VISION

A strong community where everyone thrives

VALUES IN ACTION

- **Welcoming:** We make our resources, services and expertise accessible for all, recognize the inherent dignity in each person, and provide safe places where everyone can be themselves.
- **Curiosity:** We foster a culture of exploration, innovation and forward thinking by creating environments that support learning and growth.
- **Connection:** We are neighbors. We foster relationships, listen and act to build and strengthen our community. We bring people together to share information, ideas and experiences.
- **Equity:** We work to change inequitable practices, structures and policies, and attitudes that drive them, to provide opportunities for every person in our community to thrive. As we do so, we actively examine our roles in perpetuating oppressive systems.
- **Stewardship:** We are accountable to our community, using our resources responsibly. We lead with honesty and integrity, protect privacy and preserve and share the full history of our Denver community.

STRATEGIC ROADMAP

2024 marked the close of DPL's 2021-2024 Strategic Roadmap. The Roadmap came together through a collaborative process that included extensive staff and community engagement dating back to 2019. In the last four years, we made significant progress towards achieving the objectives laid out in the Roadmap. That work is the foundation of our new 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, Denver Here.

The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, titled Denver Here, is an evolution of our Strategic Roadmap and is organized into three Strategic Themes, underpinned by four pillars of Operational Excellence. The Strategic Themes are centered around the key strengths DPL brings to the community:

- Be Here, focused on spaces
- Discover Here, focused on our technology and collection
- Engage Here, focused on our staff

Within each theme we have defined objectives that outline DPL's focus for the next six years. To address the most pressing issues, first we've established priorities which will be updated biennially. These priorities allow us to concentrate on specific aspects of the Strategic Plan, enabling us to tackle substantial and impactful initiatives while maintaining the flexibility needed to navigate our dynamic operating landscape.

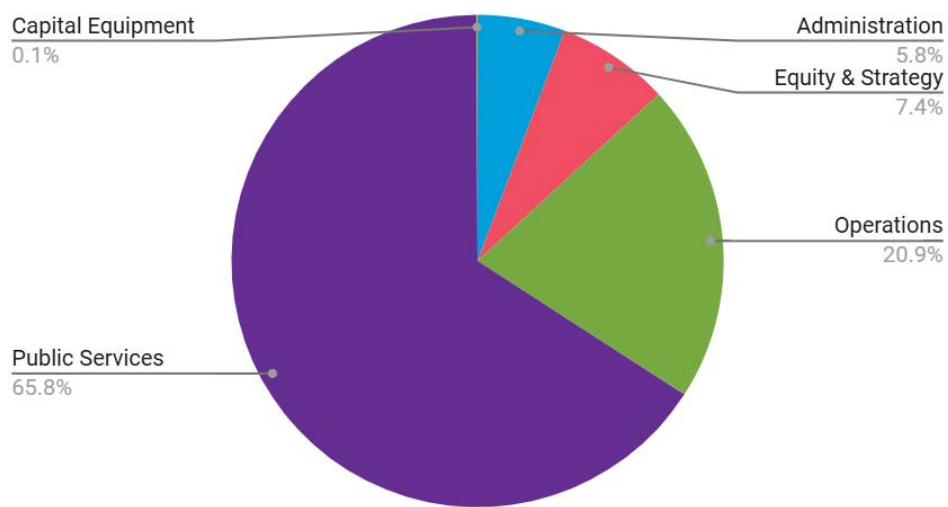
BUDGET & FINANCES

Budgeting and financial management are an essential component of local government's operations, and the library must comply with the City's budget process and timelines.

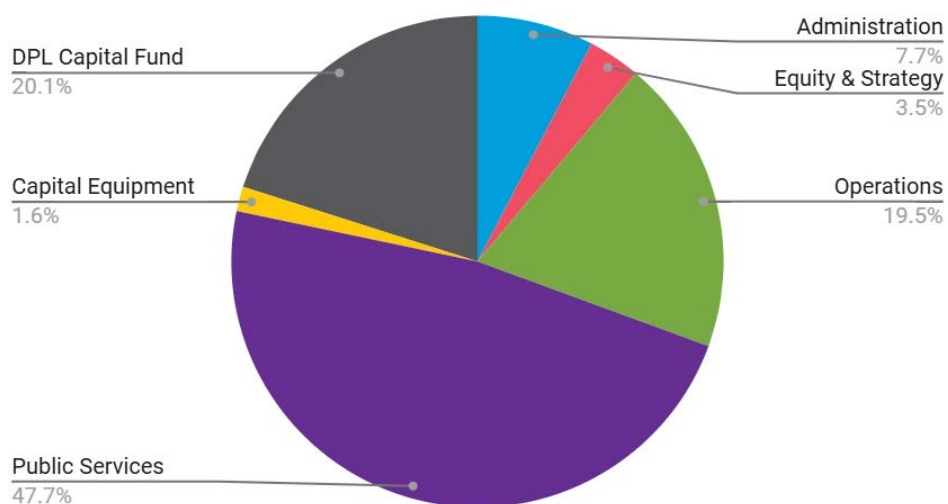
The library's operating revenue is primarily funded from City of Denver General Funds and is approximately 3% of the City's General Fund budget. In 2025, DPL will receive approximately \$61 million from the General Fund, \$37.8 million from the DPL Fund, and \$1 million from donations and state and federal grants.

Budgeted expenditures by DPL division for General Fund and DPL Fund.

2025 General Fund Budget by Division



2025 DPL Fund Budget by Division



POLICIES

Library policies reflect the library's priorities, define current practices, are comprehensive and user-friendly, and in compliance with state and federal regulations. The following is a list of our major policies.

- Safety Policy for Minors
- Collection Development Policy
- Computer and Internet Policy
- Exhibits Policy
- Library Use Policy
- Meeting Space Policy
- Photo & Video Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Recognition Policy
- Special Revenue Fund Management Policies

All library policies, procedures and guidelines can be found online at:

<https://www.denverlibrary.org/content/library-policies-resources>



DPL FRIENDS FOUNDATION

The library is fortunate to have the support of the Denver Public Library Friends Foundation, which makes generous contributions each year towards strategic objectives.

The Friends Foundation seeks to support the strategic directions established by the Library Commission. Through occasional meetings, strategic collaboration, and frequent and regular connections between the Foundation's Executive Director and the City Librarian, the two organizations stay aligned. The Friends Foundation grants annual support to the library in response to specific strategic requests.

FRIENDS MISSION AND HISTORY

The Denver Public Library Friends Foundation enriches our community by building support and raising money to enhance the library's programs and services.

Working within its stated mission, the Friends have a long history of supporting the library, stretching back to 1940. Its spirit of volunteerism and giving reaches across generations and touches the hearts of innumerable individuals throughout the Denver area and beyond.

Fundraising activities include the annual Booklovers Ball and other special events, direct mail and online fundraising campaigns, special campaigns for capital purposes, and overseeing the endowment funds. In addition, the Foundation advocates in support of and on behalf of the library.

CHECKLIST ITEMS FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

TO DOS

- Read the New Commissioner Handbook and additional materials
- Provide a photo and short bio for DPL Staffweb and Denver Library website Study the DPL website
- Attend at least one program or special event every quarter
- Share with your friends and colleagues about the library's work
- Wear your name badge when representing the library

READING MATERIALS INCLUDED IN YOUR PACKET

- Commission Bylaws
- Major Policies (This does not include the DPL Employee guidebook just because of length. Please let the City Librarian's Executive Assistant know if you would like to review it.)
- Annual Report
- DPL Strategic Plan
- Engage programming magazine
- Commission Standing Committees



10 West 14th Ave. Parkway
Denver, CO 80204
702.865.1111
www.denverlibrary.org