

Sample Public Input Policy

Sample Public Input / Public Comment at Meetings Policy (Generic NH Template)

Note: This is a portable template intended for adaptation by any New Hampshire public library Board of Trustees. It synthesizes NH RSA 91-A requirements and common best practice. **It is not a substitute for legal review by town or library counsel.**

Purpose

This policy establishes the procedure by which the Board of Trustees of the [Library Name] receives public input and public comment at its meetings. The Board values community input and seeks to provide a fair, orderly, and content-neutral process for receiving it.

Authority and Legal Framework

This policy is adopted under NH RSA 202-A:11. All meetings of the Board of Trustees are governed by NH RSA 91-A — the Right-to-Know Law. RSA 91-A does not require a public body to accept public comment at its meetings, but where comment is accepted, this policy ensures that the procedure is consistent and content-neutral.

Public Comment Period

The Board includes a public comment period at each regular meeting. The public comment period is held [near the beginning / before any vote on a major action / at a designated point on the agenda].

- The total public comment period is limited to [e.g., 30 minutes] unless extended by majority vote of the Board.
 - Each speaker is limited to [e.g., 3 minutes].
 - A speaker may yield remaining time only with the Chair's consent.
 - The Chair may shorten individual speaking time to allow all attendees who wish to speak an opportunity.
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Sign-Up Procedure

[Choose one based on local practice:]

Option A — Sign-up sheet: Members of the public who wish to speak shall sign in on a sheet available at the meeting. The Chair calls speakers in the order they signed up.

Option B — Recognition by Chair: Members of the public who wish to speak shall raise their hand and be recognized by the Chair.

Content of Public Comment

Public comment is a one-way communication: speakers address the Board, and the Board does not engage in debate or dialogue during the comment period. Board members may take notes, ask brief clarifying questions through the Chair, or request that a topic be added to a future agenda.

This policy applies in a content-neutral and viewpoint-neutral manner. The Board does not restrict comment based on the views expressed by the speaker. Reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions (speaking time limits, sign-up requirements, no personal attacks against staff, no profanity) apply equally to all speakers.

The Chair may rule a speaker out of order if the speaker:

- Exceeds the time limit
- Engages in personal attacks against an identified staff member or Board member
- Uses obscenity, defamation, or speech inciting imminent lawless action
- Materially disrupts the meeting

A ruling of out-of-order may be appealed to the full Board.

Topics Outside the Board's Authority

The Board's authority is defined by NH RSA 202-A. Comments on matters outside the Board's authority (for example, school district decisions, town zoning, federal policy) will be received but the Board may not be able to take action.

Comments Concerning Personnel or Specific Patrons

Personnel matters and matters that could harm the reputation of an identifiable individual generally must be addressed in nonpublic session under RSA 91-A:3, II(a) or II(c). Members of the public may not use the public comment period to discuss personnel matters by name. Such concerns should be submitted in writing to the Library Director or Board Chair for appropriate handling.

Written Comment

Members of the public who cannot attend a meeting or who prefer to comment in writing may:

- Submit comments to the Board Chair or Library Director by mail or email at least [e.g., 48 hours] in advance of the meeting
 - Written comments will be distributed to Board members
 - The Chair may, at his or her discretion, read written comments aloud during the public comment period (subject to the time limits above)
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Recording

Members of the public have the right to record open meetings under RSA 91-A. The Board may also record meetings for the preparation of minutes. Recording does not exempt a speaker from any provisions of this policy.

Conduct

All attendees, whether speaking or observing, are expected to comply with the Library's Patron Conduct Policy. Disruptive conduct may result in removal from the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of each meeting shall record:

- That a public comment period was held
- The names of speakers who identified themselves
- A brief description of the subject matter raised

The minutes do not include a verbatim transcript of public comment unless the Board so directs.

Review and Revision

This policy shall be reviewed by the Board of Trustees not less than every [interval, e.g., 3 years]. Amendments are adopted by majority vote of the Trustees in public session.

Adoption

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of the [Library Name] on [date]. Reviewed by [counsel] on [date].