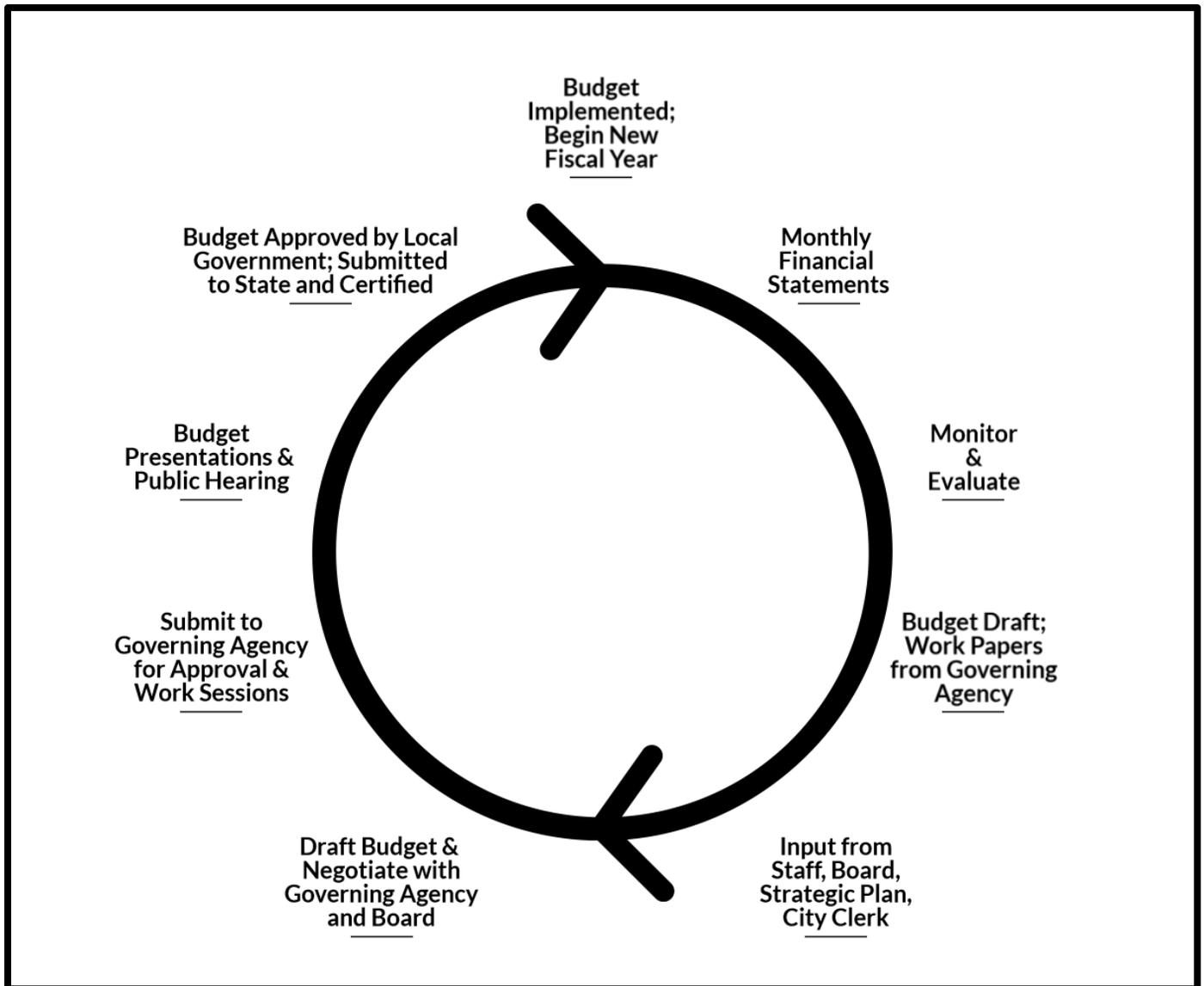


Your Library and the Budget Process





The library budget starts with a plan. What would the library (by which is meant the board, director, and staff) like to accomplish? Having a strategic plan in place makes developing the budget easier because goals and priorities have already been determined. It also makes justifying the budget easier because information about the needs of the community has already been gathered, so that the bases for budget requests are clear.

The library board is legally responsible for library finances, but budget preparation is a cooperative process involving the library board, the library director and staff, and funding agencies. The calendar for the budget process will probably be set by the primary funding agency and should be followed closely. If the library receives funding from multiple government entities, the library may very well have to keep track of a different budget calendar for each.

There are three important stages in the budget process: preparation, presentation, and implementation.

1. Preparation

The librarian, staff, and library board should share in a give-and-take process of budget discussion and review. Preparation involves some vital steps:

- Review the long-range plan, goals and objectives, and project anticipated expenditures in relation to resources.
- Develop a budget calendar with dates for completion.
- Evaluate the prior year's actual line or program costs.
- The librarian presents a budget draft to the full board for changes and adoption.

2. Presentation

When the proper time comes, the director should accompany the board to present the budget to local government officials. Because the library board is legally responsible, it is technically the board which presents the budget. Even before the presentation, every board member must be both ready and willing to support, clarify, or defend the proposed budget. To help "sell" the budget:

- Throughout the year, point out the successes, the services, and the community's response to the library. Invite city officials to receptions and library activities regularly.
- Offer quality library reference service and assistance to local government officials and departments. Show how indispensable your library is to each of them individually.
- Send copies of letters of appreciation, notice of awards and/or staff accomplishments, and newspaper articles to local government officials.
- Use the Friends of the Library and other community library supporters to help promote the library budget and to speak on the library's behalf.
- Tell the community what they can expect and what the current funding level will accomplish. Prepare brochures, newsletters, newspaper items, television spots, community meetings, etc., to help with promotion.

Because local officials must consider all services which are to be provided to the community for the next year, board members should recognize that their elected officials face many competing and persuasive appeals for the limited funds available, and be ready to explain the benefits to the community of library services.

3. Implementation

While board members set priorities and review budget implementation, they are not usually involved with the day-to-day financial operations of the library. The library director is responsible for daily operations and for keeping the trustees informed of budget expenditures.

It is useful to think of the budget process as a cycle. Once a budget year has started, the process of planning for the next year has also started. Making regular financial reports and keeping track of expenditures are important, not only because they are fiscally responsible, but because they produce information that assists in planning for the next year.

The budget process exists in real time, influenced by its environment – economic climate, political climate, expectations, exigencies, and emergencies. Many factors outside of the library's control affect the budget, so it is definitely to the library's advantage for the board and the director to be "plugged in" and knowledgeable about the municipality or parent institution and other funding agencies. For a municipal public library, a good relationship with the City Clerk is extremely important. The director of a municipal library is part of the "city team" and needs to get to know other city department heads and learn about their departments. Having allies among other municipal departments helps to get library needs better recognized, and it helps the library to make its contributions to the community. A library director must understand not only the library's budget process, but the budget process of the town.