

Library Technology Risk

The decision facing the board

What level of service disruption can the library tolerate, and what resources will it commit to reducing that risk?

What boards need to know

Start with a service: checking out materials, providing public internet access, or paying staff. Ask what happens if the technology supporting it becomes unavailable. This makes a technical discussion concrete enough to connect to the library's priorities.

NIST's Cybersecurity Framework treats governance as part of managing cybersecurity risk. Its small-organization guide recommends identifying critical systems, assigning responsibility, maintaining safeguards, testing backups, and preparing response and recovery plans. The framework is voluntary guidance, not a certification that a library is secure. [Source: NIST SP 1300, overview and Govern through Recover sections.](#)

For a board discussion, ask the director to translate the most significant risks into service consequences and funding choices. A useful report explains what is already addressed, what remains unresolved, and which decisions require board action. Detailed technical work can remain with the people responsible for operating the systems.

Questions to ask

- Which interrupted service would cause the greatest difficulty for our community?
- What could staff continue doing while that service is unavailable?
- When was recovery last tested, and what did the test reveal?
- Where does responsibility sit with the library, its parent institution, a consortium, or a contractor?
- Which unresolved risk needs a policy or budget decision from us?

A practical next step

Request a one-page discussion paper covering three priority service risks. For each, include the likely consequence, current protection, responsible role, proposed improvement, and decision needed. Agree with the director on when to revisit it.

Illustrative discussion: If the catalog is unavailable for two days, how will patrons borrow materials, what information will staff record, and how will normal service resume? Work through that scenario before deciding what recovery investment is adequate.