Sample Interview Questions for Library Director Candidates

1. Pick a total of 15-18 questions, many are similar and you may not need a question from every category, and a few might be two-part questions (ex: strengths and weaknesses).
2. Decide if you will keep similar questions grouped together or mix your questions up.
3. Determine how you will ask questions (taking turns, or if certain questions should be asked by certain board members or specific board officers).

**Intro/Overview/Work History**

* Tell us about your background, including your education, work experience, special skills and knowledge
* Tell us about your work experience in libraries.
* What made you decide to become a librarian?
* What do you like most about your present/last position?
* What do you like least about your present/last position?

**About You**

* Give us *your* elevator speech — What should we know about you?
* What do you think are the most relevant of your experiences and talents, given our stated needs for the position?
* Tell us what you feel are your biggest strengths and your biggest weaknesses.
* What do you think your references would say are your best skills and what might be some “areas for improvement”?
* Name five adjectives that describe yourself?
* What are your professional goals? Where do you see yourself in five years?
* Why did you apply for this position? What distinguishes you so that you are the right person for this job?
* What strengths do you have that would serve you best in this position?
* What is an area of improvement that you would like to make in your professional life?
* Anything else you think we need to know that we did not ask you?

**About the Job**

* Why are you interested in this position and tell me a little bit about your work history?
* What is it about our position that interests you the most?
* Tell us about your long-term vision for the position.
* Based on the job description, which of the duties do you feel most comfortable with, and which do you feel may take some time to learn?
* What do you perceive as the biggest challenges in this position? What are the biggest benefits?
* Earlier today, you had a short tour of the library. Did anything stand out to you or surprise you?
* Tell us why we should hire you for this position.

**About Past Jobs/Work Experience**

* What special aspects of your work experience have prepared you for this job?
* Why are you interested in leaving your current position?
* Describe your work experience in libraries or, more broadly, about any customer service experience you possess.
* Tell us about something innovative you’ve done in your current job (or coursework, etc.).
* In any of your working experiences, what have you done that you consider truly creative?
* What’s one thing you really like about your current job and what’s one thing you wish you could change?
* Are there things about your current job you find difficult or frustrating to do?
* Describe a workplace experience where you initiated change. Outline the steps or process you took. What was the reaction of co-workers or library users? What did you learn?
* What are some of your proudest accomplishments as a librarian?
* What frustrates you the most as a librarian? And how do you go about fixing it/solving it?
* From your other fields of work, what do feel is most applicable to being a librarian?

**Leadership/Management**

* If you had control over creating the ideal work environment for you, what would it be like? What would the people that you work with be like and what qualities would you like the board and library to have?
* What do you think are the challenges of supervising employees and have you developed a management style?
* Explain your philosophy for managing staff. This includes communication, autonomy, and professional development.
* How do you like being managed? And what expectations do you have of your supervisor?
* Tell us about your experiences supervising or training staff (or students, etc..).
* How do you respond when someone says, *“But we’ve always done it this way”*?
* What motivates you to succeed and how do you motivate others?
* What types of budget experience do you have? What size budgets have you managed? How do you advocate for the library in terms of the budget?
* Have you had experience balancing flat budgets and multiple demands?  How do you manage to be innovative within these constraints?
* How do you go about marketing the library and advocating for it [in the community, on campus, in the school district]?
* Describe a workplace conflict/issue you encountered. How did you go about resolving it?
* Describe a situation where you demonstrated particularly good resourcefulness or flexibility.

**Customer Service**

* What's more important, fixing the customer's problem or creating a good customer experience?
* What do you do when you don't know the answer to a question?
* What is good customer service?
* What are the top three qualities everyone who works in customer service must have to succeed?
* Tell me about a time that you helped resolve a particularly difficult customer issue.
* Talk to me about a time when you were unable to help the customer with their problem – what was the issue and how did you handle the situation?
* Give an example of a time that you changed a customer’s emotions from frustration to joy.
* The customer is saying you’re taking too long to solve the issue: what do you do?
* Name a couple of books you’ve read recently (fiction or non-fiction) and describe them to us as if you were recommending them to a patron.

**Organization**

* Can you describe how you schedule your time on particularly hectic day? Can you give a specific example?
* This position requires you to prioritize workload, deal with interruptions, and multitask. So how would you go about organizing yourself on a particularly busy day?
* Describe a situation where you had to meet a very tight deadline. What other things were you juggling? Did you meet the deadline?
* Describe how you have planned and implemented a project.
* Some of the job duties associated with this position are very technical and process driven. Can you tell us how you go about learning technology that you are not familiar with?
* Describe your experience working with technology: hardware, software, programs, etc.

**Collaboration/Teamwork**

* Can you give me an example of how you have worked with a group outside of the library? (e.g., student organization, local businesses, etc…)
* Tell us about a time you worked successfully with [patrons, students, the community, local organizations] to complete a project or accomplish a goal.
* Describe an experience you have had working on a team.
* You will be new to [this library, this department, this school/community, etc]. Do you have any thoughts on how you plan to introduce yourself?

**Philosophy**

* Describe your philosophy of librarianship.
* In the library, how would you work to create an environment that is welcoming, inclusive, and increasingly diverse?
* Explain your approach to customer service in [an academic, public, school, etc…] library.
* What should be the library’s role in educating its [students, community, etc…]?
* In your opinion, how has the role of the [academic, public, school, etc..] library evolved?
* How should the library tie into the [university’s, school’s, community’s, etc…] goals, mission, and vision?
* Tell us about your commitment to diversity and can you give us some practical examples?
* What non-library organizations or businesses inspire you the most?
* Can you tell us about your experiences with library assessment? This could be education, collections/resources, event programming, etc. Sketch us an overview of the role of assessment should play in [public, school, academic] libraries.

**Judgment**

* Describe a failure you have experienced. What did you learn from it?
* Can you describe a time when something you did at work didn’t go as planned, and what did you learn or what would you have done differently in hindsight?
* Describe a time when you did everything correctly and still did not succeed.
* Describe a time when a reference transaction did not go so well. Thinking back, how would you have rectified the situation.
* Describe an experience dealing with a difficult patron and how did you go about resolving it?

**Scenario Questions**

* A local citizen is objecting to a book in the library’s collection, what would you do?
* A patron complains because there are no free computers available. You notice that some kids are playing, while others are typing papers and doing research. What do you do?
* A patron complains that another person in the library “smells.” What do you do?
* You’re working at a busy desk. You have one person standing in front of you needing help researching water pollution in local rivers, you have an instant message chat question, the telephone is ringing, and the printer is jammed. What do you do?

**Library School**

* Tell us more about your coursework in….
* What’s the most important thing you learned in library school?
* Are you willing to take the required number of library credits within 3 years?

**Work Schedule**

* Are you able to meet the requirements for this job? When could you begin work here?
* Can you work a flexible schedule?
* Are you available weekends and holidays?
* Are there any reasons why you can't work your assigned hours regularly?
* What type of schedule are you looking to work?

**Candidate Questions**

* What questions do you have for us? Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Professional Development/Reading**

* How do you go about developing as a professional and what support would you like to see from us?
* How do you stay current with trends and developments in the profession?
* What do you see as some trends for a library like ours?
* What are some of the books you’ve read in the past few months?
* Who are some of your favorite authors?  Favorite books?

**Attitude**

* **Ask them about how their ex-bosses would rate them.** 
  + *Get your candidates to tell you how their last three bosses would rate their performance, on a scale of one to 10. Then, ask them to elaborate on each rating.*
  + *You want to look for people who remain respectful and fair, even if they might not have agreed with all the choices their bosses had made. Great employees often can see problems from another point of view, which is a good sign of their people skills.*
* **Get them to talk about how they screwed up on the job.**
  + *Everyone makes mistakes, but how we respond to mistakes is what our character is made of. Here's how I'd phrase the question: "****Can you tell me about an occasion or two that you screwed up in your previous job****?"*
  + *You're looking for candidates who take responsibility for their mistakes, and improve from there. Ditch candidates who blame other colleagues or external circumstances. If they refuse to take ownership of their past mistakes, they will do the same when they join your company.*
  + *If your candidates remain tight-lipped about what didn't go well in their last job, ask them in a more roundabout way instead: "****What are some things you would change about your past job?****" Then just wait for them to share****.***
* **Push their buttons and see their reaction.**
  + *Put some stress on your candidates, so that they show their true colors. Here's what I would say:* ***"Thank you, this sounds good, but I'm not getting the impression you're a superstar."***
  + *Some might start speaking passionately about their past projects that they championed -- which is awesome -- but you'll definitely get a few people who will blow up under pressure, i.e. become overly aggressive or defensive. Boot the latter out of the door.*
  + *If you're not comfortable with calling out your candidates so directly, ask them this question instead:* ***"Why do you think you're a top performer?"***

**Thinking Habits**

* **Ask an unusual question or brainteaser to see how they fill time while they think.** *Brainteasers could be about any topic you fancy, but it is critical to remember that they could be off-putting for certain candidates. Never base your entire interview on brainteasers; you won’t learn anything about your candidates and you’ll come across unprofessional. We recommend throwing (at most one or two) brainteasers into the interview, this helps expose anyone who is a little too rehearsed*
  + *“****If I asked your best friend what is the one thing about you that drives him or her craziest about you what he/she tell me?*** *You want a candidate who thinks about the question as a question, and doesn’t try to spin it into something they think you want to hear: “I over achieve at every new job...”*
  + ***“If you were a pizza delivery man, how would you benefit from scissors?”*** *A great candidate will take time deliberating over exactly what it takes to be a pizza delivery man or woman and will consider exactly how they would use the scissors.*

*Clever so-and-so’s may even come up with reasons not to use scissors, which is still perfectly acceptable, as long as there is thought behind the decision!*

* + *This question may require you give candidates a piece of paper to work on “****An apple costs 40 cents, a banana costs 60 cents and a grapefruit costs 80 cents. How much does a pear cost?****”*

*Hats off if you’ve managed to work out the answer to this one (without sneakily peaking below)!*

*It’s all about the vowels. “If you charge 20 cents per vowel, the two-vowel word ‘apple’ would cost 40 cents, three-vowel ‘banana’ 60 cents, and four-vowel ‘grapefruit’ 80 cents. Therefore, a pear would cost 40 cents.” Clever – right?*

*If anyone manages to work this riddle out in a high-pressure interview situation, then as far as I’m concerned, you’re on to a winner. (But do beware of anyone who’s too quick to answer – they may have heard it all before!)*

*However, in general, if the candidate can come up with any sensible price and a good explanation of how they came to it, then they certainly deserve brownie points. Use your initiative; is their answer sound, thought-out and practical?*

*If a candidate blurts out a number without being able to explain their reasoning, then they’ve clearly not bothered to consider the question properly.*

* + ***“A farmer needs to cross the river with his chicken, a sack of corn and a fox. His boat unfortunately only fits himself and one other thing. The fox and chicken are hungry, so if he leaves the fox with the chicken, the chicken will get eaten, whilst if he leaves the chicken with the corn, the corn will get eaten. How will the man get safely across with all 3?”***

*The answer is simple, when you know it: 1. The man takes the chicken across and then goes back for the fox. 2. He can’t leave the fox and chicken together so when he drops the fox off, he picks up the chicken. He then goes back for the corn. 3. He can’t leave the corn and the chicken together so when he picks up the corn, he drops off the chicken. 4. When the corn is safely with the fox on the right side of the river, he goes to collect the chicken*.

*Candidates who take the time to understand each varying element and work their way through potential answers strategically, are most likely to be impressive problem-solvers. If a candidate rattles off the answer immediately then chances are, they’ve faced this brainteaser before (a good, honest candidate will tell you if this is the case!) Candidates who fail and don’t appear to ‘get’ the question or forget a major part of it (for example, they let the chicken and corn cross together) may have issues with listening, as well as critical thinking.*