

Trustee Training & Development

Knowledgeable library trustees are the cornerstone of successful library services. The fact is that many trustees come to their first meeting with little knowledge about the library they are serving. They may not completely understand their role or what is expected of them. Getting library trustees from well-intentioned volunteers to well-informed library advocates requires both formal education and informal support. As the library director, you play an important role in providing both.

Starting off Right: The New Trustee Orientation

Just like with new employees, new trustees will benefit greatly from a well-planned orientation process. Your new trustee orientation should include the following:

Before the new trustee's first board meeting:

- Send a welcome letter with a packet of information: board bylaws, minutes from the recent board meetings, the current year's budget and financial reports.
- Hold a meeting with you and the Library Board of Trustees President. At this meeting you will:
 - Introduce yourself and the Library Board President.
 - Conduct a tour of the library with an introduction to library staff
 - Provide an overview of board procedures and any topics currently under discussion
 - Provide the board member with an opportunity to ask any questions he may have

At the new trustee's first board meeting:

- Introduce the new trustee to other members of the board
- Provide a copies of the library's policies, the Trustee Essentials Handbook, the library's strategic or long-range plan
- Have the Library Board President conduct the meeting in "slow motion". Take the time to explain any library jargon, give brief background on any agenda item as needed.

You may also want to consider asking another trustee to act as a mentor for the new trustee. The new trustee's mentor can help explain board culture, the role of the board, and offer advice on how to be an effective trustee. As the director, you should also reach out to your new trustee, especially during his first year, to offer your assistance.

The Learning Never Ends: Continuing Education for Trustees

Your new trustee orientation should get your new trustee off to a good start, but it doesn't stop there. The next step is continuing education for your board of trustees.

There are several great ways to make sure that your board of trustees is well-informed. Here are just a few ideas:

- Using the Trustee Essential Handbook, discuss one essential at each board meeting. There are some great starter questions at the end of each section that should help to stimulate discussion.
- Your public library system offers continuing education workshops for you, your staff and your trustees. Many of the timely topics offered will benefit your library trustees.
- Typically, at both the Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) and the Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries (WAPL) conferences, the Wisconsin Library Trustee and Friends (WLTF) division sponsors sessions of interest to trustees. Joining WLA & WLTF are great ways for your trustees to learn more about libraries and make great connections with other trustees from around the state.

Resources Available

There are some great resources available to help you and your board with trustee training and development.

Dept. of Public Instruction, Public Library Development Team

Wisconsin Library Trustee Resource Page: <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/trustee.html>

Dept. of Public Instruction, Division for Libraries and Technology

Trustee Essentials: a Handbook for Wisconsin Public Library Trustees

<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/pld/handbook.html>

Outagamie Waupaca Library System's Basic Sites for OWLS Public Library Trustees

<http://www.owlsweb.info/L4L/trustees.asp>

And don't forget your public library system's web page. Some library systems have pages devoted to trustee issues with links to online resources (like the one listed above) and others have created online workshops on trustee issues.