

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Tips for Effective Board Meetings

*By Bradley Shipp, director
Outagamie Waupaca Library System*

Are your monthly board meetings efficient and effective? Trustee Essential 4: Effective Board Meetings and Trustee Participation covers the basics of running library board meetings and provides useful samples of an agenda and annual calendar. Here are some more tips to help you spend time wisely and accomplish as much as possible.

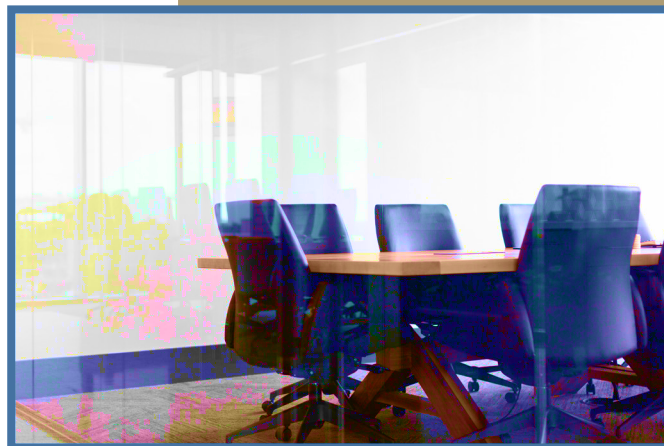
Always let the Director or Board President know ahead of time if you cannot attend a meeting. If the number of trustees expected is nearing the threshold for a quorum, the Director or Board President can send a message to the group letting them know that any unexpected absences could jeopardize the quorum and prevent the board from conducting necessary business that month.

Review the agenda and background information ahead of time. This allows you to spend meeting time on informed discussion and decision making. Many years ago former OWLS director, Rick Krumwiede, instituted a practice that we still follow. In addition to the agenda, each meeting packet includes a document called “agenda notes” which provides additional information about all non-recurring agenda items in the following format:

Agenda item 6: Approve table of organization

- Background:** At their November 8 meeting, the personnel committee voted to recommend the revised table of organization for approval.
- Action:** The board may take action to approve the revised TO.
- Exhibit:** The current and recommended TOs are included in the packet.

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The objective is to provide enough information for all board members to have a basic understanding of the agenda item and what action, if any, is required. Often, a trustee will use the language in the “Action” line as the wording for a motion.

Save time and effort for the Board Secretary by developing a minutes form. The OWLS minutes form lists all current board members at the top, so the Secretary can simply check or circle names as they call roll. Our first few motions are almost always the same – approve agenda, minutes, and financials – so those motions are typed in with blank spaces to write in who made the motion and seconded.

When the agenda is packed, and you want to keep the meeting duration reasonable or you have a firm end time, consider appointing a timekeeper for the meeting. Estimate how much time you need to spend on each topic and have the timekeeper alert the Board President when a discussion needs to wrap up. You may decide that the discussion needs to continue, and then you can make a deliberate choice about which agenda items to reschedule for the next meeting.

Set aside time at each meeting for continuing education. One way to do this is to assign one chapter of Trustee Essentials to be read before each meeting and discussed at the meeting. If you cover nine chapters per year, you will have reviewed all 27 in the space of a 3-year trustee term. When possible, choose the chapter most relevant to the following month’s business. So, if you plan to do the Director’s performance evaluation in November, October is a great time to review Trustee Essential 6: Evaluating the Director.



Similarly, assign one library policy to be read before each meeting and discussed at the meeting. By reviewing them one at a time on a regular basis, you can insure that all trustees are familiar with the library’s policies and that policies are kept up to date.

Many library trustees also serve on other boards and community groups, and you have likely attended many well-run meetings and perhaps a few of the other kind. Don’t be shy about sharing suggestions to make your library board meetings better.

Wisconsin Library Association Library Legislative Day

Mark your calendars now for the Wisconsin Library Association’s Library Legislation Day in Madison on Tuesday 12 February 2019. This is a great opportunity for library supporters to talk with their State Legislators about the value of library services and the importance of their support. Ask your library director or go to <http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/legislative/legislative-day> for more information.

Virtual Library Board Meetings

*By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System*

As conference software gets better and becomes more common, governmental bodies are taking a look at virtual meetings. What's a virtual meeting? It's a meeting conducted with one or more members in a different location, attending through phone call or via the internet. These can be great for trustees who are travelling or on snowy winter days but there are some things you should think about before beginning to meet this way.

There are two kinds of virtual meetings: meetings in which most of the board is physically present with only one or two trustees attending virtually, and meetings which are entirely virtual, with everyone in other locations. In both cases there are things to consider before going ahead with this.

First, does your parent municipality allow virtual meetings or remote attendance? Some do and others don't. Many have no policy either way.

Do the person or persons attending remotely have the proper software, hardware, and internet connection? It's important to establish this well before the meeting. Are they tech savvy enough cope with minor glitches? If you have closed session are they in a place where they won't be overheard?

If most of the board will be physically in one place it is vital you have good microphones and speakers there so the remote attendees will be able to both hear and be heard.

If the meeting is entirely virtual you must remember that you are still subject to the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law. You have to post the meeting agenda and keep minutes. Most importantly, you must provide a way for members of the public to "attend"

the meeting. You can do this either by providing a location where they can listen to the meeting or by allowing them to log in to the meeting software or dial in to the conference call.



There are, of course, drawbacks to meeting virtually. A large part of interpersonal communication is visual and is missing entirely. The chair has to make sure that everyone speaks up because people tend not to participate as actively when attending virtually. For the person attending virtually there is a great temptation to try to multitask and not pay proper attention to the meeting. And, of course, technology does not always work as it should.

The Winnefox board discussed remote attendance and added this clause to their bylaws:

Remote Attendance. Trustees may attend the meeting from another location for good reason and with the President's approval. Examples of good reason include, but are not limited to, travel out of state and extended illness or disability. Trustees attending remotely shall be considered part of the quorum and shall be able to vote. Trustees wishing to attend remotely must give the Winnefox office enough advance notice to determine the appropriate technology and set it up.

FAQ

The county has appointed a county supervisor to our board, giving our board an even number of members. Don't we have to have an odd-number of trustees? What about tie votes?

No. While Sec. 43.54 of Wisconsin Statutes specifies that a library board is made up of 5, 7, or 9 members, it also allows the county to appoint up to 5 additional members. We don't believe that a library board with an even number of members is a significant problem or cause of tie votes. At many meetings we find at least one person absent and there's a reasonable chance that any particular meeting will have an even number of trustees attending. And realistically, how often is there a vote that is that close. If this is a concern one solution is to amend your bylaws to say that the board president, or the person presiding in the president's absence, does not vote but has the power to decide tie votes.

Have questions?

Contact us and we'll try to help.

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Save the Dates – 2019

Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries (WAPL) Annual Conference

May 1 – 3

Central Wisconsin Convention + Expo Center Rothschild

There are always sessions planned with trustees in mind. The Conference schedule is still being planned, but information should be posted in February.

<http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/wapl/conferences-events/wapl-conference>

Trustee Tale is written and distributed by Outagamie Waupaca Library System (OWLS) and Winnefox Library System (WLS). Distribution to your board is funded by your home system.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions for future articles, send them to:

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