

# trustee tale

## Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

### Recruiting Library Trustees

*By Jim Trojanowski, Director  
Northern Waters Library Service*

While library trustees are appointed by municipal officials, library boards are often asked to recommend candidates for appointment, and this can be a difficult task. Here are a few tips to help make it easier.

#### ***Seek diversity***

In my experience, library boards often consist primarily of retirees and educators. While people from both groups have much to offer, the board should reflect the community.

A friend of mine is the Executive Director of a non-profit that works with the developmentally disabled. Her board created a list of skills and interests it believes it should have among its members in order to do its work well. They seek, for example, to have a parent with a developmentally disabled child and a person in the health care field on the board at all times.

Library boards can borrow this idea in order to avoid homogenous membership. What groups from the community might be wise to have on the board? People with disabilities and parents of young children are two possibilities. The board might also wish to look for people with specific skills, advocacy being one example.



#### ***Be active***

Library patrons are a common recruitment pool for new trustees. While many patrons make good trustees, I do not believe in limiting the pool strictly to card holders. Anyone who supports the mission of the library and recognizes its value to the community can be a good trustee.

Good trustees are usually active community members. Joining service clubs such as Rotary or the Lions, doing volunteer work for other groups, participating in community festivals and events, and joining other boards are good ways to meet candidates for the library board. And as an added benefit, it can be a great opportunity to talk about the library.

#### ***Remember people skills***

Disagreement at board meetings is healthy, but it needs to be positive and civil.

*(continued on page 2)*

*(continued from page 1)*

Nothing squelches discussion and makes meetings unpleasant like negativity. Trustees who refuse to respect the opinions of those who disagree or use negative body language are not good trustees no matter what other skills they have. The ability to compromise and work well with others is the one skill every trustee must have.

***Work with the entire board***

Potential library trustees should be discussed by the entire board before being asked to serve. This is important because it helps the board create the diverse membership it needs to reflect the community the library serves and because it allows for a broader pool of candidates.

***Keep a list***

While new trustees are usually recruited once a year, potential new trustees may come into our lives at any time. It is helpful to keep a written list of potential trustees for use when it is time to appoint someone new. Include a few notes about why each person is a good candidate.

Taking these steps requires time, but the reward is an active board of skilled people who work well together and assure that the library is an asset to the community.

*This article appeared in a different form in the Summer 2010 issue of Communique published by the Wisconsin Library Association*



**FAQ**

***Do we have to post a meeting notice every time the board gets together?***

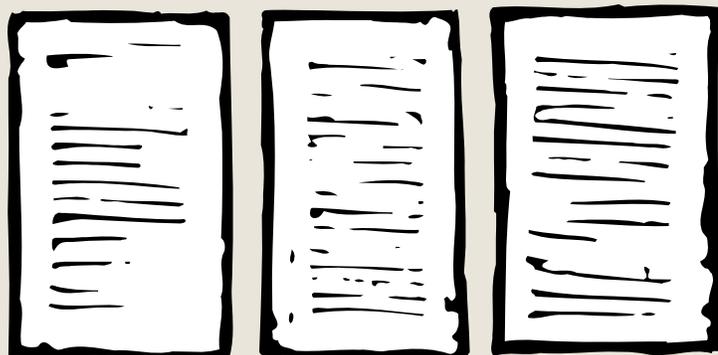
For the most part, yes. The Wisconsin Supreme Court has held that a meeting is being held whenever a gathering of members of a governmental body satisfies two requirements:

- there is a purpose to engage in governmental business and
- the number of members present is sufficient to determine the governmental body’s course of action.

Governmental business” refers to any formal or informal action, including discussion, decision or information gathering, on matters within your realm of authority. So even if the board is gathering only to participate in a workshop or attend a meeting of the municipal governing board, you should post a meeting notice.

To avoid any possible challenge, some municipalities post notice any time a sufficient number of the governmental body *may* be assembled, even for ceremonial or social occasions, for example if members of municipal board are all marching in a parade or getting together for a retirement reception.

As a general rule, when in doubt post the meeting.



## Library Trustees as Public Officials

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director,  
Winnefox Library System

Often when we think of the term “public official,” we think of a person who holds elective office. But appointed officials, such as library trustees, are also considered public officials, and as such they have certain responsibilities. These responsibilities are listed in Section 19.59, *Wisconsin Statutes*, which is entitled “Codes of Ethics for local government officials, employees, and candidates.”

Wisconsin’s ethics and conflict of interest laws for public officials are complex, and local ethics ordinances may add further complexity, but there are several key points to keep in mind.

First and foremost, you may not use your public position for financial gain or to obtain anything of substantial value for your private benefit. This prohibition also applies to members of your immediate family and any organization with which you are associated.\* This could include special privileges such as being exempt from overdue fines or receiving extended loan periods. If, however, these special privileges are available to broader groups of people, trustees may take advantage of them on the same basis as others. Examples of this would be extended loan periods given to teachers using materials for classroom instruction or a “Food for Fines” program in which library users have fines forgiven if they bring in articles of food to be donated to a food pantry.

Second, you may not take any action as a trustee that affects a matter in which you, a member of your family, or an organization with which you are associated has a substantial financial interest. Nor may you take action that produces a substantial financial benefit for yourself, a family

member, or an organization with which you are associated. This could come into play when decisions are made regarding purchasing or the letting of contracts. You may participate in action on an issue in which you have an interest as long as the action affects a broad group of people and your personal interest and benefit is not significant when compared with others. An example would be approving a “Food for Fines” program that may benefit you or a family member but also affects many others.

Third, you may not accept anything of value if it could reasonably be considered to influence your actions as a trustee or could reasonably be considered as a reward for your action.

These rules can be complex, but library trustees are not required to become experts in them. Trustees have to be conversant enough with them to be able to recognize a possible conflict and seek guidance from the appropriate authority. If you have concerns about the propriety of an action, be sure to seek advice from the municipal attorney, the municipal ethics board (if you have one), or the county corporation counsel.

Please refer to *Trustee Essential # 16: Ethics and Conflict of Interest Laws Applying to Trustees*, found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/te16.html> for more information. This resource includes URLs for the Wisconsin Ethics Board and information from the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, as well as further discussion of these issues.

\* *For purposes of the state ethics law your immediate family means your spouse or relative by marriage, lineal descent or adoption who receives, directly or indirectly, more than one-half of his or her support from you or contributes, directly or indirectly, that amount for your support. You are “associated” with an organization when you or a member of your immediate family is an officer, director or trustee, or owns at least 10% of the organization. You are not associated with an organization merely because you are a member or employee of an organization or business.*





Wisconsin Library Association  
2010 Annual Conference

## Libraries: Create Adventure

The Wisconsin Library Association 2010 Annual Conference will be held November 2-5, 2010 at the Kalahari Resort & Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells. Not only are there a lot of programs of interest to Trustees but it's a good chance to meet trustees from around the state.

For more information go to:

<http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/conferences/2010/index.htm>

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