Budget Deliberations: System Funding and 13%

All of us are keeping a close eye on state budget deliberations in Madison. Along with a host of state agencies and other organizations, Wisconsin's public library systems are taking part in the biennial struggle for fair and adequate funding. Here, in question and answer format, is a summary of the issues surrounding funding for our library systems.

Q: What is meant by 13%?
A: According to Statute, the Department of Public Instruction is required to submit a biennial budget that funds library systems at 13% of the total of county and municipal funding for public libraries across the state. Total funding is divided between the state's 17 public library systems according to a formula that considers population served, geography, and local expenditures.

Q: So what's the problem?
A: For the past several years, the legislature has failed to fully fund the 13% budget request. Funding was frozen for several years, and then there was a modest increase in the last biennium. The level of funding has slipped to about 10%.

Q: What does this mean for systems?
A: Over the last decade, many systems have been forced to discontinue many non-mandated services. (Mandated services are those that the state requires the system to provide. Non-mandated services are additional services requested by members.) While both Winnefox and OWLS have managed to continue most services during good funding years and bad, eventually, some non-mandated services may be threatened if funding does not improve. Some examples of non-mandated services systems provide include:

Printing and Graphics
Rotating Collections
Delivery beyond very basic schedules
Electronic Site Licenses
Enrichment Grants
EBooks
Money for Continuing Education
Summer Reading Program Support

Q: Does this mean that 13% is needed to continue these services?
A: Not necessarily. The 13% would allow most systems to do a number of things they can't do now. However **some** increase is necessary just to maintain current services.

For example, if the Governors Budget is approved as is with no increase for systems, shared automation network fees paid by member libraries in OWLS and Nicolet library systems would have to increase by approximately 9.5% in 2002 and 8.5% in 2003.

Winnefox may be forced to consider either limiting some services or instituting selective charges to member libraries to continue some non-mandated services.

Brian Fraley, Chief of Staff for Senator Robert Welch discusses system issues at Library Legislation Day with Directors, Beth Knuth (Wautoma), Karen Peterson (Berlin) and Cindy Wallace of Winnefox.

Q: What are some examples of what would be possible should 13% funding be achieved?
A: Systems need full 13% funding if they are to help member libraries meet the challenges of the future, especially those driven by technology. While no specific budget has been written for Winnefox, possible projects include: Purchase of a third van and addition of staff to allow 5 days per week delivery; develop "after hours" interactive reference using the Internet to allow students, and others, to access library reference sources when their local library is closed; increase subscriptions to electronic information; provide greater technical support for electronic systems at member libraries; provide more continuing education concerning technology for member library staff; and more.

Personnel Management: The Board and the Director

In the area of personnel management, it is very important that the respective duties of the Board of Trustees and the Library Director be understood and adhered to. Many public libraries have found themselves in serious difficulties because the director would not accept direct responsibility for competent personnel supervision or because individual trustees interfered with library operations. On many policies and projects the trustees and the director will work side by side as members of a planning team. But according to Wisconsin Statute, it is the director who hires and supervises library staff.

AN APPROPRIATE DIVISION OF LABOR

The **Board** employs a library director who meets the stated requirements and has the needed skills.

The **Director** hires and supervises staff according to policy and utilizes the skills and initiative of the staff members to the library's advantage.

The **Board** adopts personnel policies and a personnel handbook, making sure that they concur with local, state and federal laws that relate to employment practices.

The **Director** provides the board with recommendations and materials to review for developing the policies, and maintains the adopted personnel manual.

The **Board** provides an adequate salary schedule and fringe benefits for all employees.

The **Director** suggests improvements needed in compensation and working conditions.

The **Board** provides funding for in-service training and professional development for both staff members and board members.

The **Director** recommends appropriate opportunities.

The **Board** develops criteria for evaluating the library director's performance and reviews director's effectiveness.

The **Director** provides sample material for the board to review. The director maintains position appraisals and up to date personnel records for all staff members.

The **Director** notifies appropriate authorities of vacancies on the board, recommends qualified candidates, if appropriate, and participates with the board in the orientation of new board members.

(Adapted from The Kansas Public Library Trustee Handbook *available at Http://owls.lib.wi.us under links for librarians in the trustee section.)*

Professional Development & Continuing Education

As we all know, small libraries usually have tight budgets. Directors and Boards look at expenditures very carefully before authorizing spending. In an effort to provide as much funding as possible for materials and service directly to the public, continuing education for the library staff sometimes gets short-changed.

In order to improve efficiency and job performance directors and other staff need time for professional development and educational activities. They need to be able to learn how to use new tools & reference resources, find out about recent developments in the Library field, get ideas for starting new services or enhancing old ones, and discuss professional concerns with colleagues.

Recognizing the importance of professional development, the State of Wisconsin requires that library directors be certified. In order to maintain certification they must complete 100 hours of continuing educational activities over a five-year period. Activities may include attendance at system workshops and programs, participation in meetings of the Wisconsin Library Association or other professional bodies, enrollment in classes offered by a university or college, or some pre-approve self-directed activities.

Keeping up with continuing education is a partnership between staff and library boards. It is difficult for staff to attend CE activities unless the Board provides some paid time annually for Directors to participate in these State-mandated activities. Most libraries include funds in the budget for registration, instructional materials, and mileage for both the Director and staff.

Some municipalities may argue that this does not provide a benefit, that staff shouldn't be paid if the library is not open. Their reasoning is that when staff members are participating in educational activities they aren't working with the public. However staff cannot provide the best service possible without improving their skills. These activities may be considered an investment; something that may not show an immediate return but will yield benefits in the weeks and months to come.
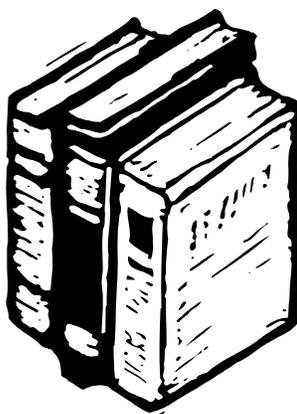
Mark Your Calendars!

Please join us for a discussion of *Personnel Issues For Library Trustees.* Bring your questions and concerns regarding division of labor, selecting staff, evaluation, termination, benefits and more to discuss with colleagues and experienced system staff. Choose one of three dates and locations. For more information call your system office or check the Winnefox Library System Web Page at www.winnefox.org and click the link under meetings and workshops.
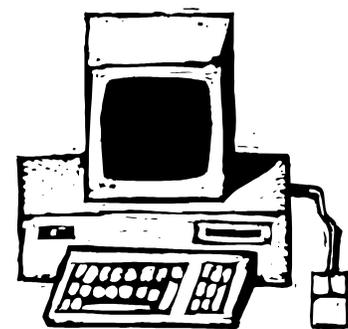
Web Links for Library Trustees:

Wisconsin Public Library Policy Resources Page
http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dlcl/pld/policies.html

This recent addition to the state's Public Library Development web site is a useful set of links to help you develop or revise library policies. Included are a number of sample policies from Wisconsin libraries, and more are certain to be added over time.

The System and Resource Library Administrators' Association of Wisconsin (SRLAAW)
http://www.srlaaw.org/

SRLAAW (pronounced sirlaw) is composed of the directors of the seventeen public library systems in Wisconsin and the directors of the systems' resource libraries. A recent project of SRLAAW was to attempt to develop a unifying vision for library services in Wisconsin. The report of this project was widely discussed by the library community around the state.

While no consensus was achieved on any single action plan, the report available on this website does provide an interesting view of what library service could be in Wisconsin.
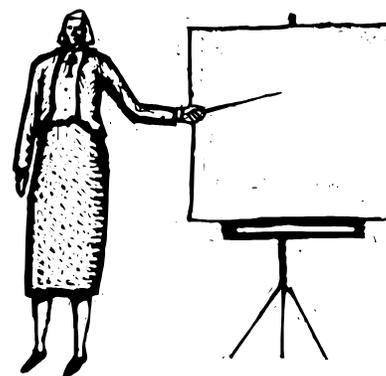
Your Board Meeting: Problems and Solutions

"Board activity relates to the solution of problems," Jack Short writes in *Library Trustee Guidelines* (1994)." We all know that solving problems can be a time-consuming and sometimes frustrating process. The director, encouraged and supported by the board, can do a great deal to facilitate problem solving.

Clearly defining a problem in itself often points toward its resolution. The board can help the director define an issue more accurately by not rushing to a discussion of solutions. Instead, time spent asking questions, reviewing the incidents or situations giving rise to the problem, and then agreeing on a statement of the problem will frequently save time in the long run.

If possible, it's helpful to consider a problem at one meeting and address it again at a subsequent meeting. That gives both the board and the director time to reflect and to generate a more complete definition of the problem and more alternatives for solving it. Good, creative solutions often arise not from the first or second options presented for consideration, but from the third or fourth or fifth. Moreover, occasionally a problem turns into a non-problem over the course of a few weeks. Sometimes all of us mistake molehills for mountains.

Whether at one meeting or over the course of two or more meetings, the director can be encouraged to present not only a problem and possible courses of action, but also a recommendation. Often she will know—or can find out by doing a little research among colleagues or in professional resources— what is likely to be a workable solution; but she may be hesitant to express her judgment. The board should help her develop and exercise that judgment. Both she and the board will find this builds a relationship of productive partnership that serves the library well.