

# trustee tale

## Newsletter for Public Library

### The Trustees' Job Description

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director  
Winnefox Library System

Before someone is hired for a new job they're usually handed a job description that lists what is expected of the employee—the job duties and responsibilities. But that doesn't always happen when a library trustee is "hired" (appointed). Ideally all prospective trustees should receive information about the job when they're asked to volunteer for the board so they know what the job entails.

The trustee job description should begin with the basics. You should tell them:

- The board meeting schedule: where, when, and how often meetings are held and how long a typical meeting lasts.
- How long their term will be (three years, unless they are being asked to fill out another trustee's unfinished term).
- If they're expected to serve on a committee, and the time commitment for that.
- The appointment procedure: who is the appointing authority, when the appointment will be made, and how soon the applicant will know.

The job description should also tell prospective trustees what is expected of them.

- Attend and participate in meetings.
- Prepare for meetings by reviewing materials.
- Review and monitor the library's budget and expenditures to ensure fiscal accountability.



*(continued on page 2)*

## ***The Trustees' Job Description - continued***

*(continued from page 1)*

- Review and monitor plans and activities to ensure the library's goals and mission are met.
- Hire, evaluate, advise, and support the library director.
- Act as an advocate for the library, library funding, and library services in the municipality, county, and state.
- Support basic library tenets such as Intellectual Freedom, Freedom to Read, Confidentiality of Patron Records, Library Bill of Rights, and the Public's Right to Information.
- Participate in other activities or fundraisers, if that's generally done by your trustees.
- Approach the work with a spirit of innovation, positivity, and respect for fellow trustees, the library director, and staff.

Equally important may be telling them that library trustees don't directly manage the library; that the board sets policies and hires the director who manages the library.

Telling potential trustees what will be expected of them helps ensure that trustees will understand the importance of their job and the commitment needed before they're appointed.

I'll continue this discussion in the next issue with an overview of how to start new trustees off on the right foot so they can act effectively.

## **Welcome Walter!**

Please welcome Walter Burkhalter as the new director of the Outagamie Waupaca Library System and co-editor of Trustee Tale.

Walter has over 20 years of library administration experience in four states. He came to OWLS from Madison, where he was the public library consultant for the Wisconsin Division for Libraries and Technology. Before that he was director of the Mid-Wisconsin Federated Library System, the Southwest Wisconsin Library System, the Shawnee Library System in southern Illinois. He has served both as president of the Wisconsin Library Association and chair of the Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries.



## Appointing Trustees who Represent the Community

by Mark Arend, Assistant Director

Winnefox Library System

Although library trustees are appointed by your municipal chair and board, that doesn't mean the library has no say in the matter. The library board and director should always be on the lookout for candidates that can be recommended to the municipal chair.

How do you choose the nominees for the library board that you send to your municipal chair for appointment? Do you send the name of whoever you can talk into to take the job or do you take care to balance your board by nominating people with different experiences and points of view representing your community.

Just as the community isn't made up exclusively of one type of person, the library board should not be composed of one type of person. You want trustees with a range of backgrounds and experiences. Also, to truly represent the community the library board needs to reflect the community.

*Here are a few things to consider:*

- **Age:** There should be a mix of ages, from 20-somethings to retirees. Some boards even include a high school student, either as a non-voting representative or as a full trustee.
- **Ethnic/Nationality:** There are very few communities like Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon where everyone is either a German Catholic or

Norwegian Lutheran. Include representatives of new groups that are establishing themselves, as well as those that have been around for generations.

- **Geographic:** You should try to have representatives from different neighborhoods or sections of the municipality. If you get a substantial amount of use from an area outside of town you may want to consider a trustee from that area.
- **Employment or occupation:** Remember the child's counting rhyme "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief, Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief"? Is your library board equally representative of a wide range of occupations and social levels?
- **Elected officials:** Having municipal and county board members on the library board can help foster a stronger relationship between the library and the municipality. (Remember that county supervisors are appointed by the county board and are counted in addition to the number of trustees appointed by your city or village).
- **Length of tenure on the board:** The best boards have a mixture of newer members, to bring in new ideas and enthusiasm, and ones who have been around for a while, to provide continuity.



## Save the Dates – 2014

### Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) Library Legislative Day Tuesday, February 11, 2014

Join other library trustees, librarians, and library-lovers in Madison for a day of talking to legislators about the importance of public libraries. For more information and registration:  
<http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/legislative/legislative-day>



### Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries (WAPL) Annual Conference May 7 – 9, 2014

Blue Harbor Resort, Sheboygan  
More information will be posted this spring. <http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/wapl/conferences-events/wapl-2014-conference>

### Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) Annual Conference November 4 – 7, 2014

Kalahari Resort & Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells,

*Library conferences aren't just for librarians! Attend sessions aimed at library trustees and talk with other trustees about library issues*

### Have questions?

Contact us and we'll try to help.

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