

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library

Library Board Virtual Meetings

by Mark Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System

From time to time I am asked if it is legal for a library trustee to attend a meeting remotely or for an entire library board to meet via phone or online service. The answer is yes but there are several issues to be aware of.

There is no requirement that a board allow a member to participate remotely. The library board first needs to decide whether to allow remote participation or to hold virtual meetings, and under what conditions. Their decision should then be codified in the board's bylaws.

All library board and board committee meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Law, even virtual ones. Provision must be made to allow members of the public to "attend" the meeting and to see and hear just as they would in a physical meeting. If, for example, the board views a presentation or information that at a physical meeting would have been projected and visible to all present then you must make provision for public attendees to view this material.

Anyone who has attended a virtual meeting knows that they are very different than meetings where everyone is physically present. Since there are no body language cues to indicate when someone wants to speak the president must take care that all participate, not just those more comfortable with this type of meeting. Speakers should identify themselves and votes should be by roll call so all can tell who is speaking and how each trustee is voting.

The president or recording secretary needs to monitor attendance to ensure that a quorum is maintained.



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Online Resources for Library Trustees

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
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There is a lot of good information on the internet for library trustees. Here's a few useful sites:

Ethics for local officials. Information on ethics and conflict of interest laws from the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board. <http://ethics.state.wi.us/localofficials/localofficial1.htm>

Trustee Resources from the Outagamie Waupaca Library System. <https://owlsnet.org/l4l/trustees>
Resources for Library Directors and Trustees from Winnefox Library System. <http://extranet.winnefox.org/legal-resources> These pages contain links selected by staff at Winnefox and OWLS

Tools and Resources for Public Library Directors and Board Members. Maintained by the Wisconsin Division for Libraries and Technology (DLT), this page gathers together information on Wisconsin library law, policies, and more. http://pld.dpi.wi.gov/pld_trustee

WebJunction. WebJunction bills itself as “An online community for library staff”. Funded by the Gates Foundation, it’s a place where library staff and trustees can share and use online resources.

Resources for Trustees are at <http://blog.webjunctionworks.org/index.php/category/trustees/>

Open meetings & public records information from the Wisconsin Department of Justice. <http://www.doj.state.wi.us/dls/open-government>

United for Libraries is a national network of enthusiastic library supporters who believe in the importance of libraries as the social and intellectual centers of communities and campuses. <http://www.ala.org/united/>

Roberts Rules of Order. This official site has official interpretations of rules of parliamentary procedure and a FAQ section. <http://www.robertsrules.com/>

LibraryLaw focuses on legal issues of interest to libraries, such as copyright, privacy and the First Amendment. It is maintained by librarian & attorney Mary Minow. <http://www.librarylaw.com/>

Advocating in a Tough Economy Toolkit
Get tips, tools and messages that work at <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/advocacyuniversity/toolkit>

FAQ

One of the library’s employees will be retiring soon. Can I apply for the job?

No. If you are considering applying for a paid library position you should resign from the library board before applying. Under the doctrine of “Incompatible Positions” court decisions and Attorney General opinions have agreed this is not allowed because this would put the library director in the uncomfortable position of supervising the director’s supervisor. In addition, Wisconsin law prohibits public officials (including library trustees) from benefiting from their official position. According to attorneys from the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, a trustee even applying for a library position may be illegal in some circumstances.

The February 2012 issue of the League’s magazine The Municipality has an excellent article on ethics and conflict of interest for public officials.

How to Talk to a Legislator (or Legislative Aide)

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System

Talking to a legislator can be a difficult experience; it's hard to know what to say. At last year's Wisconsin Library Association Conference I attended a presentation by Stephanie Vance from Advocacy Associates in Washington D.C. She presented an outline with helpful tips for planning your discussion with a legislator or aide (and don't forget talking with a legislator's aide can be just as fruitful a discussion as talking to the legislator herself or himself).

Hello, I'm [name] from [place or organization]

This helps establish relevance. You're not someone who is talking to every legislator in sight, nor are you a paid lobbyist. You are a constituent or you are representing constituents. If you're speaking for constituents but are not one yourself you should indicate that they requested you to speak on their behalf.

I am here to talk to you about....

Here's where you introduce what you want in one or two sentences. Requests usually fall into one of two areas: policy or relationship. Policy is laws, rules, and regulations. You want the legislator's support for a law or a change in law. Relationship includes activities that build a relationship between you and the legislator: you want the legislator to attend an event at your library, to write an article for your library newsletter, to present an award.

Knowing your interest in [something the person's interested in], we think you'll be interested in....

This shows you know something about the legislator; that you've researched his/her interests. It's also how you connect your request to those interests. If the legislator has an interest in children and education you talk about how your library's summer program helps kids retain reading skills over the summer. If the interest is job creation you talk about how you work with small businesses or help people with job searches.

That's why we hope you'll....

This is called The Ask. You're asking the legislator to support or oppose this legislation, attend the library 100th anniversary celebration, write an article for the library's newsletter, etc.

I'd like to follow up by....

This establishes that this isn't a one-time contact. You're going to expect an answer or call back by a particular date. You'll remember whether the legislator followed up on it or not. It establishes accountability on both sides. Of course, you actually have to follow up.

Can I get contact information for the appropriate person in your office?

This is how you're going to contact or follow up. Who should you talk to and should you call or email?

Thank you for your time.

Always thank them for their time and for considering your request. Even if they say "no" you want to leave on a friendly note because there will always be a next time. They'll remember that you took their refusal graciously without arguing or getting mad.

Following this simple outline can make your contact more effective and much easier.



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The University of Wisconsin Extension's Local Government Center has a publication discussing virtual meetings, as well as other publications of interest, posted at: <http://lgc.uwex.edu/publications/pubs.html>

Wisconsin Library Association Library Legislative Day

Mark your calendars now for the Wisconsin Library Association's Library Legislation Day in Madison on Tuesday 17 February 2015.

This is a great opportunity for library supporters to talk with their State Legislators about the importance of library support.

Ask your library director or go to: <http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/legislative/legislative-day> for more information

Have questions?

Contact us and we'll try to help.

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