

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Advocate for Your Library Now!

Advocate for Your Library Every Day!

Tips from OCLC and Geek the Library

The current funding scenario is your opportunity to bring your library—and its significance as an integral part of your community—to the forefront of local conversation! It's time to let everyone in your community know exactly how much value the public library brings to individuals and the community as a whole. You know your individual story. Tell it with passion using meaningful local statistics and impactful patron examples.

As you start this critical dialogue in the coming weeks, be sure to put the focus on your library and your community. State and national statistics are often interesting, but they may not resonate with local funding bodies. Concentrate on aspects of your library that speak to your specific community. How does the library meet the needs of your community? How does your library make a tangible difference locally? How does the library impact the local economy?

Compare your library to all of the other essential services and bring compelling examples to the table that not only personalize and localize the funding issue, but humanize it. Talk about John who lost his job and was able to get a higher paying position with the help of resume classes and online job-seeking services. Feature Samantha who came to the library every week to study during high school and is now heading off to college with a scholarship. Highlight Jim who used the library's resources to launch a new local business.

To help you become a better advocate, here is a helpful top-11 list. Keep these tips in mind as you make the case for library funding now and in how you prepare to advocate consistently moving forward.

Library Advocacy Top-11 List

- 1. Don't Wait!** Keep the library top of mind in your community all year round. If the community and your funders know you and see you as an involved community member, they are more likely to advocate for your funding needs.
- 2. Take the Library on the Road!** Many of your funders may never set foot in the library. Put the library where the people are and surprise your community by having a presence at events and places where they don't expect to see the library. Take the library message to sporting events, the farmers' market, and the mall—anywhere that people gather!

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3. **Make Connections!** Connect with the community on a more personal level. Find new and consistent opportunities to engage with community members, influential members of the community and your funders.
4. **Create Library Advocates!** Ask people in the community or local organizations to spread a positive message about the library. The messages shouldn't just come from you!
5. **Partner in the Community!** Build consistent and strong partnerships in the community. Bring value to local organizations and highlight distinct library resources, while putting the library in front of the broader community. Encourage your current partners to tell their stories to your funding bodies.
6. **Empower Your Staff!** Your staff members can be your biggest advocates. Make sure they are comfortable talking about the library and funding in any context. Encourage them to start conversations in the community—on and off the clock.
7. **Capture and Feature Compelling Stories!** The lives you change every day humanize statistics and represent the most compelling format to talk about the value of resources, staff and the overall library. Show your community real examples of how the library provides essential value to individuals and the broader community. Tell these stories to the media, influential members of your community and local funding bodies. (If you can get the person whose life you positively affected to tell the story, even better! For example, if someone thanks you, ask that person to write a short note to your funders describing their experience.)
8. **Integrate Messages and Effort!** Think about the vehicles you are using to talk to the community and find ways to integrate messages that help solidify the library's value. Ensure that the message is appropriate for the audience you are trying to reach.
9. **Use Statistics Effectively!** Only use local and national statistics that are relevant to your community.
10. **Use Social Media!** Beyond your Web site and other communication channels, dialogue with your community where they are most comfortable. Use the power of social media to consistently and effectively communicate the value of the library—and ask your fans to pass it on!
11. **Persist!** This isn't something you do for one budget cycle or one building project and then let slide when you've won (or lost) the battle. The library has been around for a long time and you want it to continue and grow into the future. Your advocacy efforts need to continue and grow as well.

Weed 'Em and Weep

by Bradley Shipps, OWLS Continuing Education & Outreach Librarian

Library staff and library trustees know that collection development is important. We all understand the importance of keeping our collections current, and our libraries work diligently to select and acquire as many new titles as possible. However, we sometimes fail to put as much effort into the flip side of that process, which involves weeding out the items that no longer work for our libraries and patrons. How much of our limited shelf space is occupied by books that are outdated, irrelevant, in poor condition, or otherwise unappealing to our patrons? What does this say to our communities about the ongoing relevance of the public library?

I am a longtime follower of the popular blog *Awful Library Books* written by librarians Mary Kelly and Holly Hibner (<http://awfullibrarybooks.net/>). Mary and Holly describe their blog as, “a collection of library holdings that we find amusing and maybe questionable for libraries trying to maintain a current and relevant collection.”

Several months ago, it occurred to me to search InfoSoup, our online catalog, for the titles featured on *Awful Library Books*. Much to my surprise – and dismay(!) – many of these “awful” books can be found on our member libraries' shelves.

Are job seekers served by resume guides more than 20 years old? Will a college-bound student benefit from a career guide that is more than 30 years old? When teens find pop-culture titles from the 1970s on our shelves, how does that influence their opinion of the library? It can be difficult to discard books. We love books! But, we need to evaluate them in the context of our libraries' missions and the communities we serve.

Books in some subject areas become outdated more quickly than others. For example medical information, travel guides, and economic forecasts (remember when Japan was going to take over the world?) should be weeded regularly. If a book has a dated design, looks beat up, or smells bad, it is unlikely to circulate even if the content is still interesting. Titles that have outlived their usefulness or appeal to our patrons should be weeded, not only to make space for better books, but to improve patrons' opinions of the library collection as a whole. Keeping outdated or unappealing books sends the wrong message to our communities at a time when public libraries are concerned about remaining relevant.

Weeding is time consuming for library staff, especially if this task has been neglected for a long time, but it is well worth the effort. Trustees should encourage and support their library directors' in make weeding a part of the library's regular operations. (OWLS and Winnefox can assist member libraries with weeding.) The result of diligent weeding will be a fresh, relevant collection that serves your community's needs, improves your library's image, and – as many libraries have reported after weeding – increases circulation.

Consider Adding a Youth Member to Your Library Board

By Rick Krumwiede, Director at Outagamie Waupaca Library System

Have you ever considered adding a youth member to your library board? A small number of Wisconsin libraries have high school students serving on their boards of trustees, and it's my understanding that they've generally found this practice to be very beneficial.

Two different models are used for including a youth member on a public library board. The first model requires the library board's appointing authority to appoint a student as a regular member of the library board. While there are specific regulations contained in Chapter 43 regarding the composition of municipal and county library boards, according to the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, "nothing in state law prohibits minors from being appointed to serve on municipal committees, boards or commissions." As long as all other statutory requirements are met, there is no problem with having a minor appointed to serve as a regular, voting member of a library board.

Under the second model, a library board may decide to include an additional, non-voting youth participant in library board discussions. As an advisory member to the library board, this type of youth member cannot vote, doesn't count toward a quorum, and doesn't replace an officially appointed board member. It's recommended that the library board's bylaws specify the appropriate level of participation for a youth advisory member. For example, what

level of participation will be allowed during discussion, debate, or closed sessions?

Regardless of the model used, adding a youth member to the library board can result in significant benefits for a library. Recently, I asked Appleton Public Library Director, Colleen Rortvedt, and Waupaca Area Public Library Director, Peg Burington, about their experiences with youth library board members. I've summarized their responses below.

How has your library benefited from having a youth board member?

The board receives instant input from someone who knows what teens think. Having a young person's perspective has been very valuable when creating policy and making decisions that may affect young people who use the library. Working with young people has also had a positive impact on how board members perceive teenagers. Boards generally like and appreciate having teen representatives because it gives them another direct connection to the community. Diversity on a library board can be very important, and greater age diversity can strengthen the board's ability to understand patron needs.



What are the disadvantages, if any, of having a youth member on your library board?

There haven't been many disadvantages. The teen representatives have been very mature and have done a great job. However, young people who are interested in being on the library board may be actively involved in many extracurricular activities, and that can interfere with attendance. If teens are appointed for regular, 3-year terms, they may leave for college before their terms have expired.

Do you have any advice to offer a library considering adding a youth member to its library board?

Provide a strong orientation. If a youth representative is serving in an advisory capacity, make it clear that there are limits on voting and participation in closed sessions. Assigning someone to mentor a new youth member can be very helpful. Remember that transportation to meetings might be an issue. The person chairing the meeting might slow meetings down a bit, encourage the use of full organization names instead of acronyms (e.g., DLTL, WLA, WPLC), and encourage the youth member's participation. Participating on a board committee can also be a good way to integrate youth members who might initially be intimidated by the larger board.

Regardless of the participation model used, there appear to be lots of benefits, and very few disadvantages, to including a youth member on public library boards. I encourage every public library board to give this idea serious consideration.

FAQ

My term on the library board is up; the village board hasn't reappointed me yet but they are planning to do next month. May I attend and participate in this month's library board meeting?

If you are a trustee for a library established by a village or city probably so. Sections 61.23(1) and 62.09(5)(e) of Wisconsin Statutes, dealing with terms of office for village and city officials, state: "Persons serving in appointive offices shall serve until their respective successors are appointed and qualify, unless otherwise provided by ordinance." You may want to check with your city or village clerk to see if an ordinance has been adopted regarding this issue.

The situation for library trustees appointed by a town or county is unclear as there is no parallel language in Sec. 59 (counties) or Sec. 60 (towns). If this situation arises you should seek legal guidance.

**LIBRARY
LEGISLATION DAY
February 14, 2012**

LLD is an excellent opportunity to talk with legislators directly and encourage their support for programs that improve library services within the state.



You can find more information at:
<http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/day/index.htm>

**2012 WAPL
CONFERENCE**

Mark your calendars for the 2012 Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries annual conference:

**May 9-12, 2012
Holiday Inn Hotel & Convention
Center - Stevens Point**

Information has not been posted yet but there are always programs of interest to Trustees.

Watch for information on the Wisconsin Library Association website:
www.wla.lib.wi.us/conferences/

Have questions?

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

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