

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Planning for the Library's Future – Part One

By Rick Krumwiede, Director

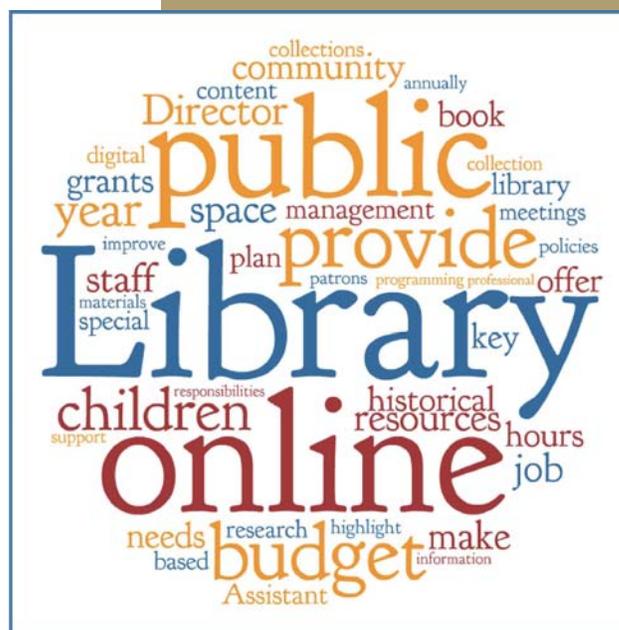
Outagamie Waupaca Library System

For many years public libraries have experienced increasing demands for their services without an equivalent increase in resources. In fact many libraries are regularly in the unenviable position of trying to meet increasing demands with shrinking resources. Consequently, every library needs to have a plan in order to determine what services it will provide and how to allocate its resources most effectively. Yet many public libraries don't regularly go through the process of creating a long-range plan. So why don't libraries plan? Library boards and directors often state that they don't have time, it's too difficult, they don't know how, or the recommended processes are too complicated. Regardless of the reasons, failing to plan is likely to result in a library that doesn't adequately address the changing needs of its community.

Benefits of Planning

Planning for libraries is a process of envisioning the future of both the community and the library and setting a direction for library movement toward that future vision. Planning provides a number of positive benefits to the library and its community including:

- Planning helps the staff and board understand the current situation of the library and community, set priorities, and establish methods for achieving those priorities.
- A board-approved plan will officially articulate the library's values, mission, goals, and objectives. Having such a plan will ensure that the library board, staff, and community have the same understanding of the library's priorities.
- A planning process is conducted within the current political and financial environment, and the library is able to plan for multiple scenarios, e.g., growth, no growth, or reduction in services.
- A completed plan will provide direction for future budgeting.
- The planning document provides a record of the decisions made during that process.
- The document also becomes a guide for decision making and action by staff and the board.



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Planning Basics

There is no one best way to plan. While there are many different planning models, the process is less important than the fact that the library actively engages in planning. Differences in communities and libraries are generally reflected in the different processes, techniques, and methodologies used by different libraries. Each library board needs to determine the appropriate level of detail and complexity for its library's planning process. Such factors as the size of the community, the local planning resources available, the length of time since the last planning process, and other identified needs may affect the process.

While there are many different planning methodologies available, almost all planning models address at least the same four questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How will we get there?
- Are we getting there?

Each of these questions can be addressed during a planning process. The *Wisconsin Public Library Standards*, statistical analysis, peer comparisons, and user surveys can be used to evaluate the library's current programs and services, i.e., determine where we are now. Focus group sessions, key individual interviews, community surveys, and demographic data can be used to determine community needs and help identify where the library wants to go. Development and articulation of library values, mission, goals, objectives, strategies, and timetables address how the library will get there. Regular review and evaluation of the new plan will help the library know if it's getting to where it intends to go.

A word of caution is in order about determining community needs and how the library might address them. Focus groups, interviews, and community surveys should be used to ask respondents about their needs and the needs of the community, not about what library services they'd like. Most individuals are only familiar with the local library's current services or have preconceived notions about libraries. Asking them about future library services isn't likely to be particularly helpful. If you can get them to identify the most significant issues facing the community and its residents, the library planning committee

can be creative in determining the library's role, if any, in addressing the identified issues.

Other important questions to address in developing a planning process include "Who should be involved?" and "What timetable should be adopted?" More information on these topics can be found in the resources listed at the end of this article. Your local public library system staff is also likely to be able to provide your library with planning assistance.

Summary

However the library decides to go about its long-range planning, it needs to happen! The next edition of *Trustee Tale* will include an outline of one possible planning model. However, regardless of the process that's selected, be sure to make it inclusive of library staff, local officials, community members, and the business community. Be prepared to provide the necessary resources and information. Plan your planning so that the participants know how much involvement and responsibilities they will have. Once the plan is completed, promote it, execute it, re-allocate resources as necessary, measure and review results, and make appropriate adjustments. A good planning process includes a plan for evaluation and review. A plan is never truly finished, since periodically the process should be repeated.

Resources

This document was adapted from the following Department of Public Instruction, Public Library Development Team resources:

Wisconsin Public Library Standards, Chapter 2: Imperatives for Planning

Trustee Essential 11: Planning for the Library's Future

Administrative Essential 16: Planning for the Library's Future



Legal Reasons for Closed Sessions

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System

Effective citizen oversight of the workings of government is essential to our democracy and promotes confidence in it. Public access to meetings of governmental bodies is a vital aspect of this principle. For this reason, Wisconsin law stipulates that meetings of governmental bodies, including library boards and board committees, must be “open”—that is that members of the public and news media may attend.

But the law recognizes that on occasion it may be necessary or helpful for a governmental body, including a library board, to meet in private, in “closed session.” In these cases the only ones present are members of the library board and any others whose presence the board finds necessary or helpful. If a committee of the library board is holding a closed session they may not exclude any members of the library board from the meeting.

In the past we have sometimes said that members of the municipal board could not be excluded from closed session meetings of the library board. This is incorrect. According to the League of Wisconsin Municipalities the library board is an “independent statutory board” and is not considered to be a subunit of the municipal board. The library board may therefore exclude members of the municipal board from closed session meetings.

The most common reasons why a library board might want to go into a closed session are listed below. If your board is contemplating a closed session you may want to contact your municipal attorney or another person familiar with the open meetings law to be sure that the potential closed session is for a legally allowable reason.

- **Consideration of employment, promotion, compensation, and performance evaluations.** This is probably the most common reason for a library board closed session. You may meet in closed session to discuss the employment, promotion, or compensation of a *particular person* or to conduct or discuss a performance evaluation. You may not meet in closed session to discuss these issues in general, e.g., to discuss the hiring process, determine a salary range for a position, or develop a method for performance

evaluations. You may only meet in closed session when a *specific person or persons* are being discussed, e.g., to decide which candidates for a position to interview, to decide what salary to offer a person, or hold a performance evaluation for a specific person.

- **Consideration of dismissal, demotion, discipline, licensing, and tenure.** A library board may meet in closed session to discuss disciplinary action of an employee. Again, this is for discussion of a *particular employee*. General discussion of your disciplinary process or procedures must be done in open session.

- **Consideration of financial, medical, social, or personal information.** The intention of this reason is to allow private discussion of matters that “if discussed in public, would be likely to have a substantial adverse effect upon the reputation of any person referred to in such histories or data, or involved in such problems or investigations.”

- **Conducting public business with competitive or bargaining implications.** You may meet in closed session to discuss the purchase of public property, the investment of public funds, or to develop negotiating strategies for collective bargaining.

- **Conferring with legal counsel with respect to litigation.** You may hold a closed session to meet with legal counsel to discuss strategy to adopt for litigation in which the library board is, or is likely to become involved.

There are several additional reasons not listed here that would not commonly affect library boards or that relate primarily to other types of governmental bodies. They can be found in the Wisconsin *Open Meetings Compliance Guide*, found at <http://www.doj.state.wi.us/site/ompr.asp>. Trustee Essentials <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/handbook.html> is also a good resource.

Note that closed sessions are never required. They are allowed, which means that the library board may choose whether it really needs to have a closed session.

If your library board wants to hold a closed session, there are some procedural steps that must be followed. I’ll discuss this in the next issue.



FAQ

If a library trustee is temporarily unable to perform his or her duties because of an illness, may the municipality appoint someone to fill the temporary vacancy until the trustee is able to return and perform his or her duties?

In the case of a city or village, yes. State law provides that if any municipal officer, other than a city alderperson or village trustee, “is incapacitated or absent from any cause,” the governing body may appoint a person to discharge the officer’s duties until the disability is removed. (Wis. Stat. secs. 61.23(1) (villages) & 62.09(5)(d) (cities). 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.

Have questions?

Contact us and we’ll try to help.

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Save the Dates – 2013

Wisconsin Library Association (WLA)

Library Legislative Day

Tuesday, February 5, 2013

Join other library trustees, librarians, and library-lovers in Madison for a day of talking to legislators about the importance of public libraries.

Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries (WAPL) Annual Conference

May 1-3, Grand Geneva Resort & Spa, Lake Geneva

Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) Annual Conference

October 22-25, KI Convention Center and Hotel Sierra, Green Bay

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

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

trustee tale is written and distributed by Outagamie Waupaca Library System (OWLS) and Winnefox Library System (WLS). Distribution to your board is funded by your home system.

