

## How to Overcome Controversy as a Board

By Chris Jenkins, President

West Bend Community Memorial Library Board

When was the last time you've had a polite disagreement with one of your fellow Board members? Maybe you felt their view was somewhat wrong, and specifically, their vote on a particular issue just boggled your mind. Or, maybe you haven't found yourself in this position quite yet, but don't worry it's bound to happen! I am here to tell you simply, take a deep breath, acknowledge and ultimately embrace your differences, and move forward for the good of your library.

I am Board President of a library that has seen its share of controversy. In fact, becoming President at all was after some dissolution of our Board over some tense partisan issues. I began to notice a pattern. A City government that was too involved in the operations of what was supposed to be a separate entity, and a Board who's progress was stagnated by habits of the past... now mind you, I'm sure I was part of these problems.

After becoming President and since, our Mayor and I rebuilt our Board with people who typically have little in common. We've embraced and sought out diverse backgrounds, experiences and thought. To me, it didn't matter their politics, gender, age, career, etc., as long as I saw their passion for wanting to make the library a better place.

This zeal has resonated in our meetings. When I see someone get worked up over a certain issue or joyous when a plan turns out right, to me that passion means they love what they're doing and they actually care about our library and what it adds to our community. Bringing together different people with a common goal allows you to create many different routes that bring you to the same finish line!



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Let me share what this has allowed us to accomplish:

We created a library park - soon to be open to and enjoyed by the community. A project that I wasn't originally supportive of, yet despite my votes of 'nay', passed. After becoming President it became MY project to nurture. I could have let it drag me down and be reflected with my behaviors at Board meetings and the like, but instead I moved on. Democracy had spoken! We as a Board decided this was the project we wanted to do, and by golly we were going to do it! And we did... I am happy to report that our park is nearly finished and created with no tax payer dollars.

We accomplished other things as well that required us to leverage our differences. We hired a new library director who has become a tireless spokesperson for our facility; created a strategic plan (a 3-year outlook on the needs of the library); and finally, this year we are balancing our budget without offsetting it using emergency fund balance - a first in a very long time. These are just some of the wonderful achievements we can call our own.

But this story is not about my Board, it's about yours. It's about the belief that we are doing this work as stewards of our communities and because we love our library. So the next time you find yourself in a disagreement with a fellow Board member, listen and encourage them to share their different view. Support them whether their idea falls or if it succeeds. Support them, because when things get accomplished, no one person should be taking the credit. You, as a Library Board, should be congratulated together!

## Legislative Advocacy

The fall elections are almost upon us which means that it's campaign season and you're likely to run into candidates. If you do, take the opportunity to talk about how important your library and library system is to your community. If you need talking points, your library director should be able to help.

## FAQ

*Our school district administrator has just left the library board and appointed someone else to represent him. He was on our personnel committee and would like to continue to serve there. Can he?*

He was appointed to the personnel committee as a trustee; when he left the board he also resigned from any board committees. If your bylaws allow for non-trustee committee members the board could appoint him to the personnel committee as a citizen member.

*He also fills in for his representative when she can't attend. Can he vote? It is his seat?*

Specific individuals are appointed as library trustees, not positions. The law does not allow for substitutes or proxy votes. He cannot vote, nor does his attendance count towards a quorum. He can attend any open meetings, and closed meetings as allowed by the board, and participate to the extent allowed by the board.

Don't forget that the school administrator or representative must be appointed to the library board for a regular 3-year term by your municipality.

## Open Meetings Law and Public Records Law Webinars

The Wisconsin Department of Justice will be holding two 90-minute Webinars on Thursday 6 November. (What's a Webinar? It's an online seminar or educational opportunity that you can participate in from any place with a computer and internet access.)

The sessions are:

- 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Open Meetings Law
- 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Public Records Law

More information can be found on the Department of Justice's Open Government page:

<http://www.doj.state.wi.us/dls/open-government>

## Developing an Effective Library: Step One, Recruiting the Right Director

*Ken Hall, former Assistant Director  
Winnefox Library System*

What is it that you want for your library? High circulation? Well-attended story hours? Excellent electronic resources? To be successful, you need funding, a competent and contented staff, a good facility, and a relevant program of service. A good library director is the foundation on which all of these other elements stand.

It is the library director's responsibility to manage the budget and take the lead in presenting the library's case to funding officials, hire, train, and supervise staff and provide the vision necessary to respond to community needs with a relevant program of service.

The director is the face of the library to community groups, municipal officials and the public at large. His or her personality shapes the way the community perceives the library. A friendly outgoing individual will make for a friendly, welcoming library.

It is important for the library board to hire a person who has the desire and aptitude to be a leader. The board relies on the director to direct both daily operations and long range planning. How can the board be assured of selecting the right individual for a director? There are several qualities to look for when hiring.

- Is the applicant outgoing and a good communicator? Can the applicant demonstrate an ability to talk with the public and articulate community needs?
- Is the applicant willing to take responsibility?
- Is the applicant able to formulate a plan of action based on broad goals, or must the applicant have every duty outlined in detail?
- Is the applicant creative and willing to take risks in applying new ideas?

It isn't that difficult to separate the leaders from the followers. An applicant who doesn't communicate well in an interview will have difficulty communicating with the public.

When asked why they want to be library directors, too many applicants respond simply, "because I have loved books all my life and the library atmosphere appeals to me." This answer should send up red flags. A good response to the question may be, "because I love reading and I want to develop services that bring the joy and benefits of reading to others. I want to work with the public and add something to my community."

A library board may go ten or even twenty years without having to recruit a director. If you are faced with this task, don't be afraid to call on your library system for help. Your system can help with writing ads, reviewing job descriptions, posting job announcements in the right places, and even provide a professional, unbiased representative to sit in on interviews. In communities where everyone knows everyone, having an outside "expert" help with interviews is often a good way to bypass friendships and hire the most qualified.

Above all else, pay the director what they are worth. Don't keep the compensation of the director low in order to keep your book budget up. An unqualified director will never be able to raise a book budget. A qualified, fairly compensated director can.



**Connect. Engage. Transform** with other trustees at the  
**2014 Wisconsin Library Association Annual Conference**  
**November 4 - 7**  
**Kalahari Resort & Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells**

This is always a great time to meet other library trustees from all over the state, learn things you can take back home, and have fun. Sessions that might be of especial interest to trustees include:

- *Choose Your Future: Strategic Planning Makes It Happen*
- *Building Campaigns- Key to Fundraising Success*
- *Preparing for the Future: Broadband in Public Libraries*
- Thursday's WLTF (Wisconsin Library Trustees & Friends) Luncheon: *Listen up, Legislators! Moving Your Representatives from Information to Action Listen Up, Library Advocates! 12 Advocacy Actions You Can Take to Save Money, Time — and Your Library!*
- *Let's Loop Wisconsin Libraries Building and Maintaining Community Partnerships*
- *Saving Your Nos*
- *Industry Partnerships: Getting Things Done Through Support from Local Business*
- *Collaborative Negotiation: When Relationships Are as Important as Solutions*

For more information go to the WLA Conference site at <http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/events-conferences/annual-conference/wla-conference-home>



**Have questions?**

Contact us and we'll try to help.

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