

# trustee tale

## Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

### Public Libraries' Economic Impact

By Rick Krumwiede

Wisconsin public libraries return \$4.06 for each dollar of taxpayer investment. In addition, the state's public libraries contribute over three-quarters of a billion dollars annually to the state's economy.

These findings are among those included in *The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries to the Economy of Wisconsin*, which was released on May 1st at the Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries (WAPL) Spring Conference. The study was commissioned by the Department of Public Instruction, funded by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, and conducted by Madison-based NorthStar Economics, Inc.

According to NorthStar founder and President, Dr. David J. Ward, who made three presentations at the WAPL conference, while public libraries aren't an economic engine that drives the state's economy, they are valuable, growing institutions that make a significant contribution to growing our economy.

Public libraries make a direct economic contribution resulting from library, staff, and visitor spending (\$326 million), and even more significant is the market value of services that are provided to library users (\$428 million). Public libraries are also responsible for the creation of nearly 6,300 jobs in the state. Even in the context of the whole state economy the economic impact of public libraries should not be discounted. Public libraries are a solid economic investment that provide a positive return, and they certainly aren't likely to go out of business or move off-shore.

During his presentations, Dr. Ward reiterated that both the \$4.06 return on investment and the \$3/4 billion annual contributions are very conservative estimates. A variety of library services, e.g., meeting room use, online books, database use, were not included in the study because comprehensive statistics are not available to use in valuing these services.

In addition to qualitative data, the study contains a wealth of information obtained from the survey of public library usage and from focus group sessions. Approximately 2400 individuals from all over the state responded to the survey, and 29 focus group sessions were held at locations throughout the state.



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It is clear from this input that Wisconsin's public libraries represent a significant knowledge, information, and service base that has real value to the state's residents. In fact, access to this collection of knowledge, information, and services may just be priceless.

I encourage library directors and trustees to become knowledgeable about this study and to begin thinking about how the results might be helpful, both locally and statewide.

You should also know that the Wisconsin Library Association Foundation is committed to disseminating the study's findings through the Campaign for Wisconsin Libraries. The Foundation's plan is to produce a variety of resources that will enable libraries to promote study results locally. Highsmith Company, a Campaign for Wisconsin Libraries Leadership Partner, will be assisting the Foundation in this endeavor.

Those of us who work in libraries understand that it's not unusual for even our staunchest supporters to be unaware of all that we do, and this fact came through in the study. I'm optimistic that we can continue to make progress telling our story, especially with another tool to help us.

It's also very gratifying that after finishing this study, Dr. Ward has concluded that the highly developed system of libraries of all types in the state is a competitive advantage for Wisconsin. Let's all work together to get the word out!

This report, as well as links to other studies of the economic impact of libraries, can be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/econimpact.html>

## Evaluating the Library Director

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director

Winnefox Library System

Evaluating the library director is one of the board's most important jobs; it's right up there with advocating for the library, overseeing the library's finances, and hiring the right director. But some boards neglect this job. If the board feels things are going well they may reason "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". If there are minor feelings of dissatisfaction with the director they may choose to avoid confrontation. But regular evaluation of the director can be useful for several reasons.

- Minor issues can be addressed while they are still small, or before the level of irritation with them becomes too great.
- The board & director can evaluate progress over the past year and can work together to set priorities for the next year.
- The board can gain a better understanding of concerns the director may have.
- If the board is unhappy with the director's performance they can set goals for improvement.

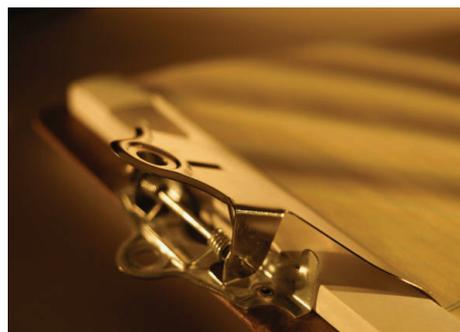
When conducting an evaluation, the director's job description is a good place to start. A second document to use is the list of goals & objectives that were set at the previous evaluation. How well has the director carried out the duties listed there?

Some other areas to discuss include:

- Are there any issues or problems that need to be addressed?
- Are there major projects coming up in the next year?
- Are there services or programs you want to emphasize or promote in the next year?

For more information:

- Trustee Essential # 6 discusses this topic in further detail. <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/te6.html>
- Winnefox has posted examples of evaluation forms at: <http://extranet.winnefox.org/evaluations.html>



## Thoughts about Public Library Systems II

By Rick Krumwiede, Director

Outagamie Waupaca Library System

*I've spent many years working in public library systems and have come to know them intimately. In the next few issues of Trustee Tale, I'll be sharing some of my reflections on systems in the hope that public library trustees can gain a better understanding and appreciation systems and how they relate to local libraries. I want to start by reflecting on the structure of systems and the tensions created by that structure.*

I'm always surprised that 35 years after systems were originally enabled in Wisconsin there are still those in the library community questioning whether the state's library system program is an equalization program. In my opinion, the Wisconsin Public Library System program is clearly an equalization program. There isn't any reason for the state to be involved in library service except to equalize opportunity for all state residents.

When systems were created, it was the intent of the Legislature that state aid funds be used by systems "to coordinate and supplement library resources and services beyond what could be provided at the local and county levels (Legislative Audit Bureau 1988)." Clearly, the public library system program was designed to equalize the opportunity for all state residents to enjoy a reasonable level of public library service. Equalization of opportunity is the primary reason, if not the only reason, the state is involved in all kinds of activities or programs.

The general rule for equalization programs is that state funds are collected via a statewide tax and distributed to localities on some basis (not related to the way funds are collected). Public library system aids follow this rule. They come from state funds generated by the income tax, and they are distributed using a formula that considers population, area, and local expenditures. As with other state equalization programs, public library system aids are not intended or expected to be returned to the localities responsible for generating them.

If state aids were always returned to localities in the amounts generated by those localities, there would be no reason for the state to be involved. There is no reason for the state to collect money and return it to where it came from. This could be done more efficiently at the local level.

I'm a firm believer that every public library needs to regularly assess whether the benefits of system membership are greater than the responsibilities and obligations that come with membership. If the benefits don't outweigh the obligations then there is a problem that needs to be addressed. While a discussion of how to compare benefits and obligations is beyond the scope of this essay, because the public library system program is an equalization program it is not appropriate for any library to focus on the amount of state aid it generates for the system in making this comparison.

## A Trustee's Basic Seven

Every public library trustee should be able to answer a few basic questions about his or her library at any time, whether over the produce at the grocery, socializing after church, or called to task by an upset citizen. Seven very basic things to know are:

1. **Hours of operation**
2. **Budget**
3. **Upcoming programs**
4. **Location(s)**
5. **Phone number(s)**
6. **Web address**
7. **Mission or purpose for being**

Number two, budget, refers to the current year's operating account and does not mean the trustee should be able to recite the entire budget—just know approximately how much income the library is expecting to collect and spend during the fiscal year.

The last item, far from the least, also does not mean one is able to recite, word for word, the official mission statement, but should be able to say, in his or her own words, why the community has a public library. What is it there to do? Why should we care that we have one?

Mission statements aren't new; the Library of Alexandria in ancient Egypt had a mission statement: to acquire a copy of every "book" extant.

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While that may be too ambitious for your library, the mission of the Evanston (IL) Public Library “is to promote the development of independent, self confident, and literate citizens through the provision of open access to cultural, intellectual, and informational resources” and that may be attainable, in some degree, by most any library worthy of the name.

Source: *T3:Trustee Training Tips, Winter 2007*  
*Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives*

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## TRUSTEE SOAPBOX

*Do you have a question, comment or topic to suggest for a future TrusteeTale? Send an Email to Mark at:*  
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