

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Knowing Your Values Helps Decision Making

By Greta Thompson

When I was in college in a past century, we learned that the scientific method required us to be objective. We weren't supposed to let our personal opinions and feelings bias our research. The difference between objective and subjective was neat and clear, and the fence between them was high.

There's just one problem with that model. It doesn't work. Our personal viewpoint inevitably shapes how we see everything from the leaders of foreign countries to the books and videos on the library shelves to the behavior of the young adults talking in the parking lot.

These days we're more likely to say that being conscious of our personal views and biases is the important point. "I see where you're coming from," a friend says and then tries to tell us where he's coming from. If we're lucky, we can find common ground or at least a place where we can understand and respect each other.

What does all that have to do with being a trustee? Well, first, it can help individuals in a board meeting discuss issues. "Okay, I see where Joe's coming from. It's a legitimate point of view. But from my perspective..." Ideally this will lead to consensus or compromise and reduce the number of occasions when you leave a meeting, muttering, "Joe's off the wall. Out in left field."

But, secondly, each trustee is part of a larger whole with significant powers and responsibilities. The board is more than the sum of its parts. As a whole, it has a point of view, expressed in decisions and policies, for example, that probably differs from other libraries in the area. Just as it's helpful for an individual to be aware of his own and others' perspectives, it's also helpful for the board to be aware of its perspective.

Where is your board coming from when it approves a policy or a plan? What are your values as a board? Your priorities? Do you see the library as a community gathering place with lots of programming for all ages? Or do you see the library as a quiet oasis for reading newspapers, browsing the home improvement collection, and exploring a website on your investments? Not you, Joanne or Jim or Marilyn, but you, the Board of Anytown Public Library.



(continued from page 1)

Occasionally it's good to step back from the routine of reviewing bills and approving minutes and even making decisions in order to think about why you choose the alternatives you do. Having thought about your values and priorities, you'll find it easier to make decisions that are compatible with others you've made and lead toward realizing your goals. If Anytown Public Library's priority is to offer a strong program of service for children, then being aware of that will help you set a budget that reflects your commitment. If you want to promote the library's services to the underprivileged, the board will probably decide to approve the director's request to attend a statewide conference on the topic. If a staff member is confronted with a difficult choice, thinking about the library's declared values can facilitate a good decision.

At OWLS we have a Statement of Philosophy that expresses the system's basic values. It's been extraordinarily useful as a decision-making tool for nearly twenty years, which means it's informed and then outlived quite a few long range plans.

We're currently working with one of our member libraries to develop a long range plan. At its last meeting the library board approved a Statement of Values that came out of the planning process. With that in place, the planning committee is finding

it relatively easy to develop appropriate goals and objectives. What's more, staff members on the committee report that they're already referring to the Statement when they're making decisions. The time spent articulating the values and the resulting document may prove to be the most useful element for this library in the whole planning process. Even more useful than the plan itself? Maybe so.

Understanding where you're coming from as a board will almost certainly help you get to where you're going.

OWLS Statement of Philosophy

http://www.owls.lib.wi.us/about_us/pp/plans/system2000.pdf

Scroll to Page 5 or use Ctrl-F to find "Statement of Philosophy"

Who is (or is not) the Wisconsin Public Library User?

By Mark Arend

Early this year the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium sponsored a telephone survey of Wisconsin residents' attitude towards and use of public libraries. The WPLC felt it was important to conduct this survey for several reasons:

- ♦ Previous library use surveys were done in the late 1970's and early 1980's and this old data was being used to make policy decisions.

- ♦ New survey data could be used to assist library supporters in political & funding efforts.

- ♦ The data could be used as a baseline when future surveys are done.

In January and February 2003 the WPLC call center got 611 people to complete the survey. This may not seem like enough people to be statistically significant but it is; the survey reflects overall attitudes of Wisconsin residents with a 4% margin of error.

Respondents were about evenly divided between users & non-users (defined as people who had or had not used library

services in the past 4 months) and reflected the general population fairly well. There was a slightly larger percentage of rural residents surveyed than in the general population and the median age of respondents was older. Only persons 14 and up were surveyed, however, and when that was factored in the survey's respondents were much closer to the state's median age.

There were some interesting results.

- ♦ Just under half the population (48%) consider themselves regular library users.

♦ 80% of library users and over half of non-users believe the public library to be an essential part of their community.

♦ Library users are more likely to vote. 80% of library users voted in the 2002 gubernatorial election versus 65% of non-users.

♦ Political affiliation is no indicator of library use; persons of all political affiliation use the library.

♦ 45% of users and 32% of non-users thought that libraries needed to be funded better.

♦ Library users buy more books than non-users.

♦ 59% of the respondents would feel very positively toward a company or individual that makes a donation to a public library. This suggests that a donation to a library will have an impact beyond the library community and library users.

♦ A majority (83%) of library users agree that their public library is personally important to them. However, even among those who are not regular library users, 33% agree that their library is personally important to them.

People's overall satisfaction with library services is very high: 98% of users and over 80% of non-users are very or somewhat satisfied with library services. There is an attitude that libraries are important to the overall quality of community life even if they're not important to that individual.

The survey report can be found on the WPLC web site at:

<http://www.winnefox.org/wplc/current/survey2003/>

Libraries and the State budget

By Mark Arend

Library service in Wisconsin is changing. Budget decisions being made on the state and local level will affect library funding and library services for years to come.

- ♦ The library systems that provide services to local libraries are state funded. Years of minimal increases and a cut in 2003 leaves systems less able to give your libraries the support they need.
- ♦ Lower shared revenue payments to municipalities & counties and tax freezes will affect local budgets.
- ♦ Lowered levels of state support of schools may mean cuts in school libraries & media centers. Teachers and students will be using the public library more
- ♦ UW System libraries supply many hard-to-find items through interlibrary loan. Cuts to the UW System means less funding for those libraries.
- ♦ Support for statewide library service contracts such as Badgerlink, and special services for disabled persons may be endangered.

As a library trustee, it is important for you to be aware of how legislative issues may affect your library and to speak up when you feel it necessary. Your community's representatives in the Legislature—your Assembly Representative and Senator—need to know how their decisions affect your library.

***These sites will help tell you
the current status of the budget.***

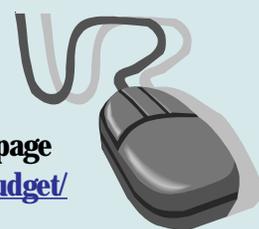
Oshkosh Public Library's state budget information page
http://www.oshkoshpubliclibrary.org/pages/state_budget/wistatebudget.html

The Wisconsin Library Association's legislative information page
<http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/legis.html>

The Wheeler Report <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/>
News stories, press releases, and more.

WisPolitics.Com <http://www.wispolitics.org/>
"Wisconsin's premier political news service"

The Wisconsin State Legislature <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>



Summer time is kids' time at public libraries. Browse a few sample websites to see what some Wisconsin libraries and systems have online for children, young adults, and their caregivers.

Oshkosh Public Library: Kidspace

<http://www.owls.lib.wi.us/laugh/default.htm>

Oshkosh Public Library: Teen Summer Reading Program

<http://www.oshkoshpubliclibrary.org/Summer/teensrp.asp>

Appleton Public Library's Family Pages

<http://kids.apl.org/>

Appleton Public Library's TeenLink

<http://teen.apl.org/index.html>

OWLS Summer Library Program website for children

<http://www.owls.lib.wi.us/laugh/default.htm>

OWLS Links for Librarians: Children's Librarians

<http://www.owls.lib.wi.us/info/links/child.htm>

Madison Public Library's Kids and Families

<http://madison.scls.lib.wi.us/youth/slp.html>

TRUSTEE SOAPBOX

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