

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Changing the Guard?

by David Polodna, Director, Winding Rivers Library System

Libraries are surprisingly stable institutions. Even with all the talk about approaching obsolescence, libraries continue to see increases in users and a devotion to the traditional resources that have been a staple of American libraries for all their history. The directorships of libraries also have proven to be quite stable, with the same individuals leading their institutions for two and three decades. Yet, with all this persistence, nothing lasts forever — both books and people change and sometimes wear out.

When a director resigns or retires, this can seem like a traumatic situation for a local library board. Because library leaders stay so long in their positions, few library boards are well versed in the search, interview, and hiring process. And few have a good sense of what their chances are of finding qualified candidates interested in applying to work in their libraries. Finally, some library boards are not well informed about state laws that apply to library directors. All this unfamiliarity can make the prospects of replacing a director a daunting enterprise. But it need not be that way.

When a library director announces that she or he will be leaving the job, the first thing the library board should do is sit back and take a collective deep breath. Be calm, don't panic, and don't make any rash moves. There is time to learn what is needed, prepare the process, and initiate the search. Second, I strongly recommend that the board contact its library system for help. The system can readily explain the legal requirements for certification: this will help the board know what kind of qualifications will be required of eligible candidates. The system staff can also help to prepare job ads and electronic postings, interview questions and letters of agreement. They can even provide advice on carrying out the review of applications and composing the interview committee and its procedures. Ultimately, the system can help to assure that nothing in the hiring process jeopardizes the library's standing as a member of the system and the statewide library network.

Often library boards feel that they will have difficulty finding people who qualify for the director's position. Particularly in smaller communities, there is a fear that no one with the proper credentials will be interested in taking the job. In nearly thirty years of hiring library staff, I have never experienced a situation where there were no qualified and desirable candidates for the positions being offered. You might not always have as many to choose from as you like, but as the saying goes, it only takes one good person. Furthermore, there are often people from outside the area who are looking for opportunities in smaller communities because they want to get away



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Web 2.0

by Tasha Saecker, Director, Menasha Public Library

Web 2.0 is taking the library world by storm. Some of the hottest programs at library conferences focus on how Web 2.0 can be used by libraries to better serve their patrons, especially the new generation of adults who have been using technology all their lives.

Web 2.0 takes the Web and changes it dramatically. The original web is where you would go to find information, research subjects using Google, buy a book on Amazon, or find a great deal on EBay. All of those websites offer an interface where the company provides the bulk of the content and visitors go there simply to access the provided information.

That is all changing. In Web 2.0, websites are dynamic, when you visit the site you see a personalized interface that you have had a hand in customizing. You provide the content, make comments, and interact with other people who use the site. You, the user, are the center and your interaction is vital.

There are several sites that epitomize Web 2.0 and its inherent interactivity. Blogs and wikis are right in the center of this movement where people can easily start creating their own sites with their own writing and opinions featured prominently. The top wiki site online is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that can be edited by anyone who signs up for a free account. Wikipedia has created waves in the library community as librarians debate whether a diverse group can create a viable encyclopedia rather than the more traditional writings by experts.

Another Web 2.0 site and one of the most popular sites online is Digg.com. It is a news site where the news is decided by the users of the site. If you like a news item, you “digg” it, meaning you recommend it to others. Each user has the ability to affect what is shown. But that is not where the interaction ends. Users can also comment on the existing news stories, read and react to others’ comments, or submit a new story for inclusion. It is truly user-driven news.

Tagging, or allowing users of a site to assign their own subjects to items, is also a feature of Web 2.0. One of the largest tagging sites is del.icio.us. By allowing users to create their own tags, a network of recommended sites is created. You can follow the tags to new sites you haven’t discovered yet or find others online who are interested in similar things. It is a fascinating way to build a community.

RSS feeds are an important part of the Web 2.0 movement. Feeds push information to you, rather than you having to visit sites to discover new content. It saves your time as well as grouping all the new items together in a handy piece of software called an aggregator or feed reader. The top online feed reader is Bloglines.com. All Web 2.0 sites offer feeds at a variety of levels, allowing you to subscribe to the exact information you want.

It is an exciting time to be out on the web and experimenting with new technologies. The question becomes what libraries are doing to capitalize on these interactive features. How do library boards support the library staff in learning Web 2.0 and adapting to the changing expectations of our patrons? It is important to offer the time and space for librarians to learn and play, so that we can create our own Web 2.0 tools and applications. We are all interested in what our communities have to say and these technologies just may be the key to learning more than we have ever known and being more responsive than we ever could have been.



Legislative Update

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director, Winnefox Library System

The state budget deliberations have taken up a great deal of the Legislature's time but several other bills have been introduced in this session which are of interest to library supporters. Here is a rundown of their status as of the middle of August.

SB-1 would give library boards an additional option for investing gifts and donations. Under this bill boards would be able to transfer gifts to a related public library or community foundation for use in enhancing library services and programs. This bill has passed the Senate and has been referred to the Assembly.

AB-141 would prohibit use of radio frequency identification (RFID) tags in documents. RFID is a relatively new technology that can be used in libraries to check books in and out, inventory collections, and similar tasks. Most members of the library community oppose this bill because as the bill is written library materials would be included in the prohibition.

Two almost-identical bills, **SB-214** and **AB-433** would change the library confidentiality law to allow a library to release 'records produced by a surveillance device' to law enforcement officials investigating criminal conduct alleged to have occurred at the library.

AB-420 (not to be confused with Act 420 which was passed by the Legislature last year) would add an additional method for calculating a municipality's exemption from the county library tax. Under current law, a municipality can exempt from the county library tax if the municipality levies a tax for public library services at a rate that is equal to or greater than the county library tax rate. This bill would allow a municipality to exempt from the county library tax if the municipality supports the library at no less than the average of the last 3 years.

AJR-27 & AJR 34 are proposed constitutional amendments that would sharply limit the use of segregated funds. As currently written they would prohibit the use of the money from the Universal Service Fund (USF) for library system funding. The USF helps pay for telecommunications and

internet access in rural and poor areas of the state and is funded by a tax on telecommunications companies. Part of the funding for library systems comes from the USF because of the role of library systems in providing high-speed internet access to libraries in rural areas. About a third of library system funding in the proposed 2007-2009 state budget would come from the USF. Both resolutions have been introduced in the Assembly.

The Assembly and Senate have each drafted versions of the 2007-2009 state budget. Library system funding, BadgerLink, and funding for statewide library service contracts (interlibrary loan, CCBC, and Library for the Blind) are the same in both versions. There are, however, several differences which may affect libraries:

- The Senate's budget proposal exempts county payments to libraries for services to residents living in municipalities that don't have their own libraries from levy limits. The Assembly's proposal does not contain this exemption.
- The Senate's budget proposal would allow local governments to increase the tax levy by 4% or new construction, whichever is greater. The Assembly's proposal limits increases to new construction only. The current limit is 2 % or new construction, whichever is greater.
- There are two provisions in the Assembly's proposal which would reduce the amount of money going to the Universal Service Fund (USF).
- Currently, to be a member of a library system, a municipality or county must fund libraries at a rate no lower than the average of the previous three years. This is known as Maintenance of Effort (MOE). The Assembly's proposal would eliminate this provision.
- Under current law, 10% of state fines and forfeitures are retained by counties. The remainder is deposited in the Common School Fund and is used for school library media centers. The Assembly's proposal would allow counties to retain: (a) 20% of state fines and forfeitures; and (b) 30% of state fines and forfeitures collected within one year of the effective date of the provision that were imposed at least 180 days before the effective date of the provision.

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from the pressures and expenses of urban living. The point is, a library board should not conclude that there are no good candidates if it hasn't made a search.

From the system perspective, the greatest problem that can arise is for a library board to take actions in regard to hiring a director that leaves the library noncompliant with state law and system membership requirements. Like it or not, systems are forced to act as compliance officers within their regions, and that means that they have to enforce compliance with library law. A noncompliant library places system funding in jeopardy, and that places services to all member libraries in jeopardy. Hunting for solutions after noncompliance has occurred is seldom a pleasant endeavor, and usually someone's feelings are hurt before a remedy is found. Dealing with noncompliance is a system's least favorite activity, but it is still our responsibility and we cannot ignore it. That is why it is always our wish to assist a library board before noncompliance is the reality.

Hiring a new director is perhaps the most important and exciting authority that a library board gets to exercise. It is a situation filled with potential and opportunity.

It should be undertaken with relish, and should be a rewarding, constructive, and progressive experience. And thus it can be if the library board is patient and prepares itself by gathering the information and assistance necessary to assure a positive and legal outcome.

TRUSTEE SOAPBOX

Do you have a question, comment or topic to suggest for a future TrusteeTale? Send an Email to Mark at: Arend@winnefox.org.

Graphic Artist: Renee Miller
Editor/Author: Mark Arend

or email arend@winnefox.org
Winnefox: Mark Arend, 920-236-5222
them to:
suggestions for future articles, send
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Winnefox Library System
106 Washington Avenue
Oshkosh, WI 54901-4985