

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Creating a Common Agenda With Your Elected Officials

by Mark Arend, Assistant Director, Winnefox Library System

As funds get tight it is becoming even more important for library trustees to become advocates for their library with local and state elected officials. Your libraries and your library system depend on funding from these government bodies and your voice is important.

The Wisconsin Library Association is recommending an approach recommended by Patricia Cavill, a librarian and consultant who has worked extensively with the American Library Association, the Canadian Library Association, the American Association of School Librarians and numerous other organizations in developing advocacy programs.

In her article, *The Importance of Creating a Common Agenda*, Cavill makes two important points:

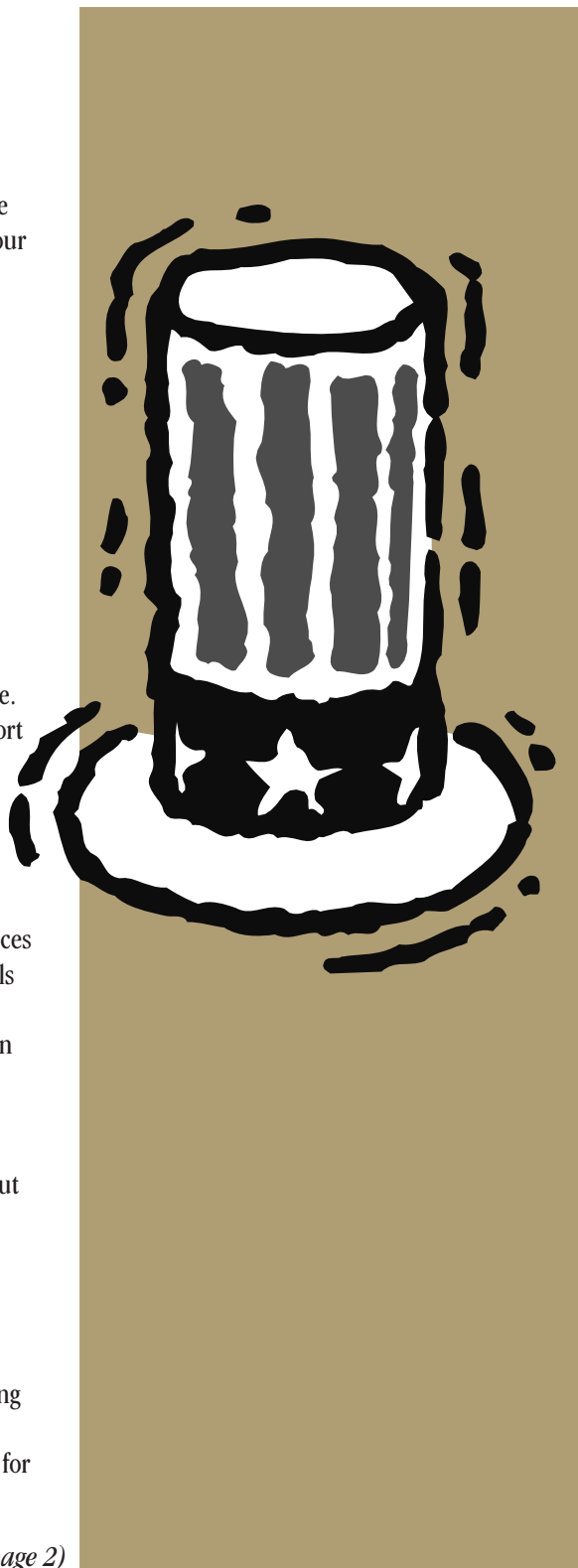
- People (i.e., elected officials) do things for their reasons, not yours.
- People (i.e., elected officials) pay attention to the things that they love and value.

For better or worse, that's how political agendas are developed. Public officials support issues for which they have a strong interest. The challenge is to find the points of alignment with our library agenda and that of our elected officials.

Education is one possible point of alignment. There's a strong consensus that the education of our young people should carry a high priority. Helping adults who are improving their education is equally important. Through their collections and services public libraries provide valuable support services to both public and parochial schools and to adult learners; public libraries are the "other half" of the education system.

- Public library summer reading programs are valuable in helping children retain reading ability over the summer vacation. Multiple studies have shown that children who participate in public library summer programs and read over the summer do better in school than children who do not.
- Public library collections supplement our schools' resources. Teachers check out library books and other materials for classroom use and students work in the library and check out items to use at home.
- Students use the Interlibrary Loan system to borrow textbooks and research materials from libraries around the country and on occasion even from other countries.
- Public libraries are often active partners with local literacy organizations, helping to educate adults
- Adults participating in distance learning programs often use library computers for their education. Library staff proctor tests for adult students.

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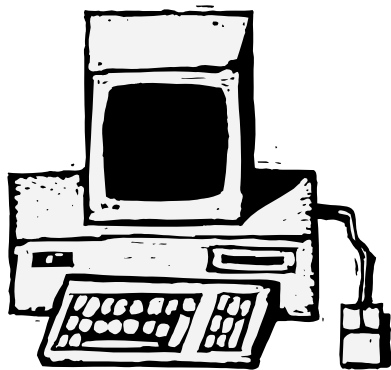


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Job training and economic development is another point of alignment. These are major priorities in the current economic downturn. Discussion points might include:

- Many county job centers have closed and public libraries have become resources for job-seekers. Among the services provided by many public libraries are:
 - Assistance using computers to write resumes and letters of application
 - Proofreading resumes and letters
 - Assistance in finding job listings both in the newspaper and online
 - Assistance in finding maps and directions for job interviews and job fairs
- Over half of major employers now only accept applications online; many people applying use the library's computers to apply for jobs.
- In every community, libraries are a go-to source for information that helps entrepreneurs start and grow businesses.
- Libraries are a smart financial investment for communities.

There will be other points of alignment. You know best the issues that are important to local officials and what things are closest to their hearts.



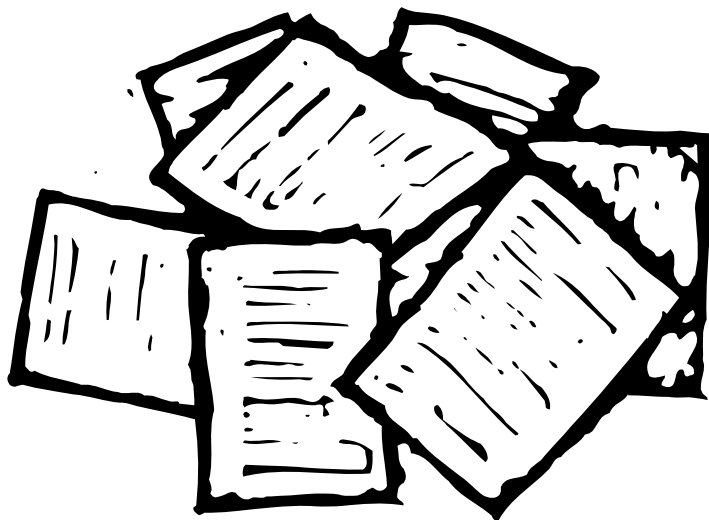
Library Photocopy Machines and Library Records

by Mark Arend, Assistant Director, Winnefox Library System

CBS news recently reported that most photocopy machines, and some printers, manufactured since 2002 contain hard drives which store all documents copied by the machine. When the copier is sold or traded in these documents may still be accessible to technically-proficient people. This is a concern for libraries for several reasons.

Many people use the library's public photocopy machine to copy personal documents such as tax returns and medical records. If they were retrieved these documents could be used for identity theft. These machines may also used to copy the library's personnel records and other confidential documents.

Some manufacturers provide instructions on how to remove this information from the copier's memory and libraries should check the instruction manual before disposing of photocopy machines. If the instructions are not in the manual libraries should check with the service vendor for instructions.



FAQ

Our library director is going to be retiring soon. Should we include salary information in the ad?

Including the salary range and benefits information in a job ad is a good idea. Because of personal financial needs people often look for a job that pays at a particular level or includes certain benefits. If this information is not included in the job ad people may apply for and even be offered positions that they would not have applied for had they known the salary range. Including this information saves time for all concerned.

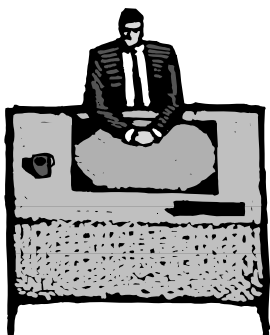
Trustee Responsibilities from the System Point of View

by Rick Krumwiede, Director, Outagamie Waupaca Library System

Recently, I was asked to speak to a library board about “being a local library trustee from the system point of view.” While I’ve spoken about trustee responsibilities on many occasions, I’d never been asked to speak about them from this broader perspective. I found this exercise to be very interesting, and I appreciate this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

I believe most library boards understand their primary job is to provide administrative oversight of their local library. They understand the importance of hiring and supervising the director, setting policy, overseeing finances, and planning. However, some library boards aren’t very knowledgeable about the larger context in which their libraries operate, and they are unclear about their responsibilities in this context. I’d like to recommend three ways that local library boards can address this larger context, i.e., the system perspective.

First, library boards need to understand and comply with statutory system membership requirements. Most trustees have a general knowledge of system membership requirements, but it’s important to understand the specific details of these requirements. Systems are charged with holding member libraries accountable for meeting the requirements, and understanding the specifics can help local library boards avoid inadvertent non-compliance.



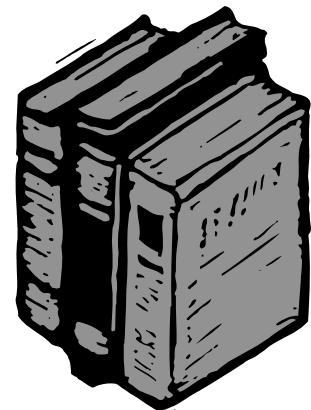
Second, library boards need to understand the importance of being “good citizens” of their systems and automation consortiums. This means understanding that there is a tension between local autonomy and being part of the group. In fact, libraries choose to sacrifice some autonomy when they decide to reap the benefits of membership in a larger group. Being a good citizen of the group also means that a library must try to contribute to the group, not just take from it. No library should rely on other libraries in the group to provide its local patrons with materials, programs, or computers.



It’s sometimes difficult for a library board to remember that it doesn’t operate in a vacuum. These days, libraries are so connected that almost every decision a local library board makes has the potential to impact another library – near or far. Consequently, policy-setting should be done in the context of the larger group. Library boards need to consider the impact of their policies on neighboring libraries, and they should make every effort not to preempt the policies of their neighbors. We know that patrons are mobile and often use multiple libraries, so it’s also important to understand the value of implementing policies and procedures similar to those of other libraries.

Third, it’s important for library trustees to engage in advocacy beyond municipal borders. This requires being educated and informed about issues at the county, state, and federal levels. While many trustees regularly contact municipal officials about local issues, they often fail to make similar contacts beyond their municipalities. Trustees don’t always realize that county, state, or federal contacts can result in significant benefits for their libraries. Trustees can also be effective advocates by participating in state and national library associations.

Providing administrative oversight of the local library is likely to remain the highest priority for local library boards. However, being knowledgeable about system membership requirements, considering the impact of local decisions and policies on other libraries, and engaging in advocacy beyond the library’s municipality are all important tasks for public library trustees that will be helpful for their local libraries and for the broader library community.



UPCOMING EVENTS

**Libraries Create Adventure
The 2010 Wisconsin Library Association
Conference**

November 2-5

Kalahari Waterpark Resort & Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells

Travel to the Kalahari for the 2010 Annual Wisconsin Library Association Conference. Not only will there be a selection of programs for library trustees but this is a great opportunity to discuss library issues with trustees from around the state. You can find more information at: <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/conferences/2010/>

Have questions?

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