

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Thoughts about Public Library Systems I

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.

Public library systems in Wisconsin, particularly multi-county systems, are strange beasts. The anomalous structure of systems makes them difficult to understand and complex to manage.

While you can look, you won't find other organizations in Wisconsin that are "joint agencies" of multiple counties, are funded by and accountable to the state, must deal with multiple constituents, and provide services to totally autonomous units. It's no wonder that we're not understood. This structure has its charm, but it also results in strange twists of logic like the potential for systems to be penalized for the misdeeds of their members.

The basic conceptual model for systems (i.e., a federation or federal model) is not a bad one. Federalism implies independent units coming together to create a common identity in order to do some things better. In a pure federation, the outlying units give the center its powers. The center does not have authority to control, but rather it coordinates, advises, influences, and suggests. This model fits together very well with local libraries that are autonomous, optional municipal services. It also seems appropriate for systems that are created by counties.

Obviously, federated public library systems in Wisconsin are not "pure" federated organizations. Systems receive state funding, are subject to state requirements, and seem to act as an "arm of the state" in attempting to equalize the opportunity for all state residents to enjoy a reasonable level of public library service. It is through systems that the state has chosen to implement its policy "to provide laws for the development and improvement of public libraries..."

Systems exist in two different structural environments, which is wrought with tension. There is a fundamental tension between a system's role as the center of a federation and its role as an

When I came on the Appleton Library Board, thirteen years ago, I was asked "Why do you want to serve?" I have stood beside and in the Statue of Liberty, toured Ellis Island, been inside the U.S. Capitol, held my hand on my heart and recited The Pledge of Allegiance. But nothing in the world reminds me more of what it means to be an American, living in a free society, as walking through the doors of a public library, which could just as well have Emma Lazarus' words from the Statue of Liberty written on its doors ... a huge sign saying "everyone is welcome here" with the emphasis on anyone

—Rev. Will Bloedow, Trustee,
Appleton Public Library &
Outagamie Waupaca Library
System

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Board Self-Evaluation

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System

It's common for the library board to evaluate the library director, and for the director to evaluate the library staff, but how often does your board sit down and evaluate itself?

There are several reasons an annual self-evaluation can be a useful tool. First, if all is well an exercise like this can keep your board on track by reminding members of pitfalls to avoid. Second, it may help identify developing problems while they are still small. And third, it may help trustees voice dissenting opinions; you may find that some members have different opinions of how well the board operates and how effective it is.

To kick off your evaluation, ask each trustee and the director to take a few minutes before the next meeting to rate their agreement with the following statements. Then take a half hour or so at the meeting to go over everyone's answers and discuss areas that could use improvement.

Rate each statement. Do you:

A—strongly agree

B—agree

C—disagree

D—strongly disagree

E—don't know

BOARD DUTIES

- We have a clear sense of what our community values and expects for library service.
- We are consciously aware of our responsibility to oversee the library's finances.

- Working with the library director, we have an appropriate long-range plan for the future.
- Working with the library director, we evaluate the library's effectiveness annually.

BOARD ORGANIZATION

- We are well-served by our officers.
- We have effective committees.
- We have a useful orientation for new trustees.
- We have useful trustee continuing education activities.

MEETING EFFECTIVENESS

- Our meetings are orderly and productive.
- All members participate in meetings.
- The frequency and length of our meetings is about right.
- The board is skillful in solving tough issues.

BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

- The board has a good relationship with the municipal head and governing body.
- There is mutual respect between the board and the library director.
- The board supports and cares for the library director.



For more information see:
Trustee Essentials

Doing good even better : How to be an effective board member of a nonprofit organization by Edgar Stoesz

Nonprofit board answer book : practical guidelines for board members and chief executives by Robert Andringa

Legislative Update

By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System

Two library-related bills have passed by the Legislature recently.

2007 Wisconsin Act 34

Last November, Governor Doyle signed SB 214 into law. As a result of this legislation, a library director may, without a court order, disclose video surveillance records that are

- Pertinent to the alleged criminal conduct.
- Produced by a video surveillance device (that is)
- Under the control of the library

This law has no impact on any other kind of library records. It addresses only the issue of video surveillance records.

SB-1

This bill has been passed by both houses of the Legislature and Governor Doyle is expected to sign it into law, however he has not done so as of the middle of February.

This bill gives library boards an additional option for investing funds received from gifts, donations, and bequests. Under current law, the library may transfer donations to the treasurer of its municipality, entrust them to a public depository; or transfer them to the library board's financial secretary. This bill allows boards to transfer donations to a 501c3 charitable organization if the organization's purpose is to provide support for the library.

Joint Libraries – An Interesting Model for Public Library Service

By Rick Krumwiede, Director
Outagamie Waupaca Library System

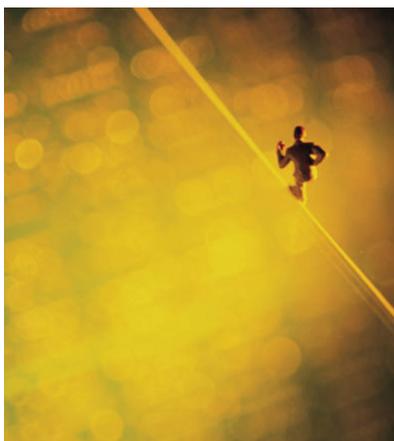
Most of Wisconsin's public libraries have been established and are operated by an individual municipality. Generally, cities or villages operate public libraries, but there are also a small number of consolidated county libraries in the state. State law also contains provisions that allow two or more municipalities to cooperate to operate what is known as a joint public library.

Joint libraries are an interesting alternative to the most common governance models for public libraries. According to Section 43.53, *Wisconsin Statutes*, "joint libraries may be created by any 2 or more municipalities . . . by appropriate agreement of their governing bodies." In essence, two or more jurisdictions are allowed to join together to form a single public library entity.*

Why would two or more municipalities want to form a joint library? The most common reason is to pool resources in order to expand the base of support for an existing library. For example, a small village or town library might benefit by forming a joint library with an adjacent town or towns. In this scenario, the joint library would be funded by a direct appropriation from each of the participating municipalities. If the residents of the adjacent town or towns tend to use only this public library, it may make more sense for them to pay for library service through town taxes that would go directly to the joint library. Because all participating municipalities would be represented on the joint library board, all of the library's

users would have a stake in the governance of the library. The participating towns, having ownership in their local library, might also be willing to provide a greater level of support to the library than the library would receive through the county.

Another reason to form a joint library would be to consolidate two smaller libraries into a single library. The resulting library is likely to be stronger than either of the individual libraries, and this improved service is also likely to be provided at a lower cost than could be achieved by two separate libraries. Generally, costs are reduced by operating only one facility. This consolidation would also eliminate the duplication of some staff, program, or service costs.



Another scenario would be to form a joint library from multiple existing public libraries. For example, two adjoining municipalities with libraries could decide to have both of their libraries operated as a single library entity. One library board would oversee the operation of both libraries, and the municipalities would share the costs of operating both facilities. This type of consolidation could generate cost savings due to economies of scale. In this scenario, there would only be one director, one staff, one board, one budget, and one collection shared by two locations, which could save both time and money.

While joint libraries can be a good alternative, a joint library may not be appropriate in every situation. For example, a town located between two villages with libraries might be interested in forming a joint library with one of the villages. However, if the town's residents regularly use both libraries, forming a joint library with one village probably wouldn't make sense. The town's residents would be likely to continue using both libraries, but if the town supports the joint library at a level sufficient to exempt from the county library tax, the other municipal library would no longer be able to receive county funding for serving the town's residents. The net effect would be to decrease funding to the adjacent municipal library that would still be required to serve to the town's residents. The overall result is a less equitable situation that could create hard feelings between neighboring municipalities.

The appropriateness of a joint library in any particular area depends upon the geography of the political boundaries, population demographics, library use patterns, and the nature of the relationships between the neighboring municipalities. The staff of your public library system can assist in assessing the merits of forming a joint library in any particular area. Please don't hesitate to call upon them.

*While joint libraries are subject to most of the same laws as municipal libraries, the establishment of a joint library board is dependent upon the provisions of an agreement between the participating municipalities. At one time it was possible for multiple jurisdictions without libraries to create a joint library. However, state statutes currently prohibit the establishment of a new joint library unless it includes at least one municipality with a public library established before May 8, 1990.

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arm of the state. There is a tension between mandated requirements and local needs. There is a tension between a statewide equalization program and local control. A system's interests may never be exactly the same as those of its members or those of the Wisconsin Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning (DLTCL).

I don't think this structural tension is insurmountable; it may even be productive. However, it is important for public library trustees to understand and be conscious of the nature of the environment where systems operate in order to understand and appreciate how systems function and the relationship between systems and local libraries. Systems and their member libraries can easily get into trouble when they aren't sensitive to the tensions that sometimes exist between their roles.

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.

South Central Library System announces *Trustee Update* newsletter

In an effort to keep library trustees and members of county library boards better informed about library issues, SCLS has begun publication of a quarterly newsletter called *Trustee Update*. Issues are available at <http://www.scls.info/pr/trustee/>

Editor/Author: Mark Arend
Graphic Artist: Renee Miller

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Winnefox Library System
106 Washington Avenue
Oshkosh, WI 54901-4985