

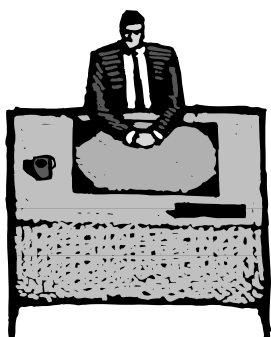
Trustee Responsibilities from the System Point of View

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.



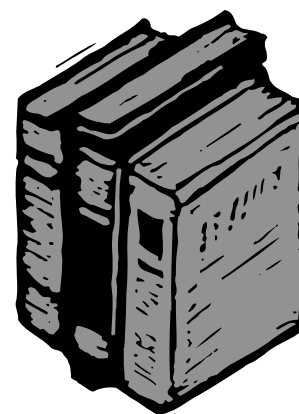
Second, library boards need to understand the importance of being “good citizens” of their systems and automation consortiums. This means understanding that there is a tension between local autonomy and being part of the group. In fact, libraries choose to sacrifice some autonomy when they decide to 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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