

TE27: Trustee Orientation and Continuing Education

Trustee Orientation

To carry out their duties effectively, new trustees need information about the library's services, needs, and plans. They also need some understanding of the legal responsibilities of the library board and the relationship of the board to the municipality, and to the library director and other library staff. A good orientation will provide new trustees with the answers they need to undertake their duties confidently.

The orientation program should be planned step by step by the library board, with the assistance of the library director. Orientation should start as soon as possible after the new board member is appointed—before the first meeting, if possible. See the attached Sample Trustee Orientation Outline for ideas.

Trustee Continuing Education

Even the most knowledgeable and experienced library trustee needs continuing education to stay informed about new laws, new technologies, and new possibilities for library service. Library services and library policies must constantly change to keep pace with changing community needs, new laws, and new technologies. Library leaders, including library trustees, who stay informed of these changes, will be better able to provide high-quality library service to their community.

Probably the most valuable type of continuing education experience for trustees is attendance at system or statewide workshops or at conferences such as the annual Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries (WAPL) and Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) conferences. One of the most rewarding aspects of system and statewide workshops is the opportunity to share experiences and ideas with trustees from other libraries. Information about these workshops and conferences is available in your system newsletter.

Because trustees are busy people with many commitments, it may be difficult to find the time to participate in many workshops and conferences. Fortunately, there are many other ways to learn and stay informed.

Newsletters and Discussion Lists

Your library system's newsletter is a great source of regional and statewide library news and developments.

One of many benefits to membership in Wisconsin Library Trustees and Friends (WLTF) is the WLTF newsletter, which contains news and information important to Wisconsin library trustees.

The Division for Libraries and Technology has used a variety of methods to disseminate information to the Wisconsin library community. The newest method of communicating is the [Wisconsin Libraries for Everyone blog](#); we encourage trustees to follow this blog. The final issue of the Channel Weekly electronic newsletter was published on December 18, 2014. Channel Weekly archives will be available indefinitely on the DPI website.

The Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (WPLC) hosts [WISPUBLIB](#), an email list that allows the Wisconsin public library community to share news and ideas and to get answers to questions about public library services, policies, laws, and more.

Other Continuing Education Ideas

Short continuing education sessions can be held during library board meetings. This is a way to reach every trustee on the board (hopefully) and also a way to involve the board in brainstorming or problem-solving discussions on issues that may be important to the library.

The Trustee Essentials that make up this handbook can be used for short continuing education sessions held during regular or special board meetings. The meeting agenda should alert board members that a particular Trustee Essential will be reviewed at the next board meeting. Each board member should read the Trustee Essential in advance of the meeting and bring to the meeting any questions or thoughts concerning the issues raised by the Trustee Essential. Most of the Trustee Essentials include discussion questions. Perhaps a board member (especially one with experience on the topic to be covered) or the library director or a library system staff person could volunteer in advance to lead the discussion.

Keep in mind that your library system offers professional consulting services to member library staff and member library boards. These consultants are knowledgeable about a wide range of library practices and issues, as well as new laws and new technologies that may be of interest to your library. Consider inviting a library system consultant or other expert to lead a continuing education session at a regular or special board meeting.

Active involvement in an organization like the Wisconsin Library Trustees and Friends (WLTF) and/or the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF) is another excellent way to keep up to date on library issues and share ideas with fellow trustees.

Websites

The DLT maintains a [Wisconsin Library Trustee Resource Page](#). This webpage features many other resources to support the activities of library trustees. Many library system websites also have important information for library trustees.

Budgeting for Trustee Continuing Education

The annual library budget should include funding for trustee continuing education. Funding should be provided to pay the expenses for trustees to attend library system workshops and send at least one trustee per year to the annual WAPL and/or WLA conferences. Funding should also be provided for at least one trustee's membership in WLTF (and WLA).

Discussion Questions

1. What issues do you want to learn more about? Where can you turn to learn more about those issues?
2. Should the Wisconsin Library Trustees and Friends look into voluntary certification for library trustees? If so, what should be required to earn certification?

Sources of Additional Information

- [Appendix I: Sample Trustee Orientation Outline](#)
- Your regional library system staff
- Division for Libraries and Technology staff
- [Wisconsin Library Trustee Resource Page](#)
- [Wisconsin Library Trustees and Friends \(WLTF\)](#)
- [United for Libraries](#)