

Library Director Certification

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Background

The Wisconsin Legislature has declared that it is the policy of the state to provide laws for the development and improvement of public libraries. Librarian certification has been part of Wisconsin law since 1921, when the legislature, at the urging of the Wisconsin Library Association, passed the first comprehensive state public librarian certification law. The concern was that the public libraries of the state be headed by qualified library personnel, assuring a high level of professional management and administration of Wisconsin's library resources, programs, and services.

Wisconsin's current public librarian certification law reflects a continuing interest in ensuring that qualified personnel direct Wisconsin's public libraries. The law requires a broad educational background, as well as coursework designed to focus on the issues and concerns relevant in a public library setting. The law also recognizes the need for public librarians to increase their skills and knowledge and be prepared for the challenges and responsibilities.

Library Board Responsibilities

Public library boards are required to hire library directors who are currently either appropriately certified or eligible for certification. Only libraries with properly certified library directors can be members of a library system.

Library boards recruiting for directors should specify that a required qualification for the job is eligibility for a Wisconsin regular or temporary public librarian certificate appropriate to the library's municipal, joint municipal, or county population. The employment contract and/or letter of appointment should specify that as a condition of employment the director will obtain and maintain the appropriate certification.

A regular certificate signifies that the holder meets all of the general education and library education requirements for the grade level. A temporary certificate signifies that the holder meets all of the general education requirements but not all of the library education requirements for the grade level. Temporary certificates are valid for only a limited time period before they must be replaced with regular certificates. An uncertified new library director needing a temporary certificate *must* apply for it within three months of the date of hire.

It is *not* the intent of the certification law that the various grade levels of certification be used either as conditions of employment for positions other than the library director or as requirements for advancement within an organization.

In This Trustee Essential

- Requirements for certifying your library director
- Continuing education to maintain certification

Summary of Certification Requirements

A regular certificate is valid for a period of five years, with legally prescribed requirements for recertification every five years.³ The required level (grade) of certification depends on the population⁴ of the library's community. The certification grades and their corresponding educational requirements and populations are:

Grade I: Administrators of municipal, joint, and county public libraries with a municipal, joint municipal, or county population of 6,000 or more, and administrators of public library systems are required to hold grade I certificates.

Educational requirements: Bachelor's Degree from a college or university approved by an accrediting association of more than statewide standing and a Master's Degree from a library school program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) or a Master's Degree from an unaccredited library school program if the division is satisfied that the program leading to that degree is substantially equivalent and the applicant's professional experience is demonstrative of the ability to provide professional library services.

Note: Temporary certification will be granted for one year to applicants for Grade I certification to allow completion of the Library and Information Science Master's Degree.

Grade II: Administrators of municipal, joint, and county public libraries with a municipal, joint municipal or county population between 3,000 and 5,999 are required to hold at least grade II certificates.

Educational requirements: Bachelor's Degree from a college or university approved by an accrediting association of more than statewide standing, including or supplemented by twelve semester credits for the following courses:

- Basic Public Library Administration
- Advanced Public Library Administration
- Organization and Management of Collections
- Public and Community Services

OR

Bachelor's Degree with a minor in Library Science and completion of Advanced Public Library Administration

³While this summary should be helpful to you, you should see the latest edition of the *Certification Manual for Wisconsin Public Library Directors* for the most comprehensive and authoritative treatment of the certification requirements set forth in the *Wisconsin Administrative Code* Chapter PI 6.

⁴ For the purposes of this summary, "population" means the population of any village, city, township, or county which operates a public library or the combined population of municipalities participating in a joint public library.

Note: Temporary certification will be granted to:

- Applicants for Grade II certification in order for them to complete the four required courses. Temporary certification may be renewed on an annual basis up to three times for a total coverage not exceeding a period of four years, provided the applicant has completed a basic public library administration course by the end of the first year and at least one course by the end of each subsequent year, not to exceed four years. The certificate is not renewable a fourth time.
- An applicant for grade II certification who has a bachelor's degree with a minor in library science but has not earned three semester credits of coursework in advanced public library administration.

Grade III: Administrators of municipal, joint, and county public libraries with a municipal, joint municipal or county population representing a population under 3,000 are required to hold at least grade III certificates.

Educational requirements: For initial certification, 54 college semester credits (including at least 27 in the liberal arts and sciences) at a college or university approved by an accrediting association of more than statewide standing, including or supplemented by 12 semester credits of coursework or the equivalent, approved by the Division, in the following areas:

- Basic Public Library Administration
- Advanced Public Library Administration
- Organization and Management of Collections
- Public and Community Services

Note: Temporary certification may be renewed on an annual basis up to three times for a total coverage not exceeding a period of four years, provided the applicant has completed a basic public library administration course by the end of the first year and at least one course by the end of each subsequent year, not to exceed four years. The certificate is not renewable a fourth time.

A *temporary certificate* may be granted to an individual who was previously certified and whose certification has been expired for at least one year and who has not served as the administrator of a public library or public library system in Wisconsin during that period. For details, see the *Certification Manual for Wisconsin Public Library Directors*, Lapsed Certification.

Special *provisional certificates* are granted in certain circumstances, such as for an individual who is employed as the administrator for a public library in which he or she was originally certified at the appropriate grade level but who is no longer properly certified due to population growth.

Continuing Education

Library directors are required to participate in continuing education activities in order to maintain their certification. These activities may be library system workshops, college courses, Wisconsin Library Association general and unit conferences, or a variety of other educational programs—as long as the activities are directly related to the individuals' position or will permit advancement in the profession. Every year, librarians should report their continuing education activities to their library system continuing education validator. Every five years, as part of the recertification process, librarians *must* report their participation in continuing education activities. Library directors in all grades must participate in 100 hours of continuing education including at least 10 hours of technology training over the five-year period.

The Division for Libraries and Technology recommends that, at a minimum, every library should budget sufficient annual funds for the continuing education needed to maintain the library director's certification and improve his/her knowledge. Payment of certification fees is recommended, as well as paid leave time and payment for other expenses needed to pursue continuing education.

Discussion Questions

1. What is in jeopardy if the library does not have a certified library director?
2. Is it advantageous to look for a director with qualifications higher than your community population requires?
3. Should the library board take some responsibility for assisting its director to acquire continuing education? If yes, to what degree?

Sources of Additional Information

- *Certification Manual for Wisconsin Public Library Directors*. Department of Public Instruction, 2011
- Your library system continuing education validator (See *Trustee Tool B: Library System Map and Contact Information*.)
- Division for Libraries and Technology staff (See *Trustee Tool C: Division for Libraries and Technology Contact Information*.)

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