

# Top Ten Tips

1. Title
2. Introduction
3. We know the law
  - a. We know that they have exclusive control over the library fund and the property, they audit and approve expenditures and approve the budget, they supervise the administration of the library, set policy, and file the annual report. They have to know those things... but this isn't about the what-- we know the WHAT. We're talking about the HOW.
4. Countdown: Top Ten Tips
5. Number 10
  - a. Number 10: Provide each new trustee with a library orientation. Yes, we are starting light and simple, but this is really important. A lot of you probably do this already, but try to think about what YOU can gain from this orientation. Don't just hand them a binder of meeting minutes, ten minutes before the first meeting. Have coffee, get to know them and their interests. Discuss the library's mission. Be strategic about your conversation and begin to build trust by showing that you are organized, have a vision, and you know what you are doing. Even if you know this person already, you are now beginning a new and different relationship with this individual. So make that first impression one of friendliness, but with a load of professionalism. That will go a long way when you ask for support or advise them on something.
6. (10 continued)
  - a. Here are some great resources to include. LINKS have been provided for your convenience. While you CAN print these things out, it is less convenient from a maintenance and a tree-saving perspective. Perhaps you can create a google document with links to these orientation documents, and share it with your trustees. That way, you can keep them up to date and don't have to worry about getting binders back or paying for new ones as trustees change. Yes, you may have the occasional luddite who wants print versions of everything, but for the most part this will save you time and make it much easier to make those print copies for the trustee or two that needs them.
7. Number 9
  - a. Number 9: Help them to understand how an EFFECTIVE BOARD operates. This is important because there are a lot of ineffective boards out there from all types of organizations. Most of the time they function poorly because they simply don't know any other way of operating. I am not talking about knowing Robert's Rules, although that can be part of it and a cheat sheet from the Winnefox library system is linked here. I AM talking about understanding the essential pieces that make a meeting GOOD: coming to the meeting prepared, knowing the laws,

understanding WHO does what, making decisions as a board, and other things like behaving ethically and knowing other important laws.

- b. I have included a link to a sample set of bylaws, which are the guiding documents of a library board and should cover those pieces necessary for the board to operate effectively. Good bylaws should include details regarding appointments, statutory authorities, officers and a definition of their roles, meetings rules and requirements, duties, and conflicts of interest. These key components should help to resolve a number of challenges standing in the way of effective board function. Bylaws should be reviewed occasionally because it reminds trustees of their operating rules, but they do not need to be updated very often, unless there are SIGNIFICANT changes, such as the total number of trustees, or changes in officer requirements (such as combining the secretary and treasurer positions to a secretary/treasurer). ALWAYS try to make your changes when you are not in a crisis! Try to be more deliberate and mindful, rather than reactionary, with your changes. This is true of policies too. You can get into the weeds pretty quickly if you try to use bylaws and policies to solve every little issue.
  - c. I've also included a link to Trustee Essential 4, which is all about effective board meetings and trustee participation. Good stuff for you to review, so please take a look at that.
  - d. Did you know that the board president has no special decision-making authorities? That is correct-- the position of board president authorizes that person to do things like add items to the agenda and run the board meeting effectively, ensuring that all voices are heard. A president has no special authorities beyond that, and does not have the authority to speak for the board in any circumstance. The one thing that a president MAY have is **possibly** a higher level of engagement, so sometimes it may be nice for a director to use the president as a sounding board, but a president **never** has the authority to make a decision for the board. When you listen to, or allow more authority for, individual trustees, you set yourself up to have more than one boss, which will be very problematic if they don't have identical opinions. You have one boss-- the library board. You should not receive direction from any individual, and understanding effective boards is a great way to avoid that scenario.
8. Number 8
- a. Number 8: Help them to understand the principles behind public libraries. At the very least, trustees should have an understanding of intellectual freedom, which ALA recognizes as "the rights of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment. Intellectual freedom is a core value of the library profession, and a basic right in our democratic society. A publicly supported library provides free, equitable, and confidential access to information for all people of its community."
  - b. Just a few words on privacy and confidentiality. In a library, user privacy is the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one's interest examined or scrutinized by others. Confidentiality exists when a library is in possession of

personally identifiable information about users and keeps that information private on their behalf. Confidentiality is a library's legal responsibility, and that is extremely important because policies and procedures need to be in place, but they really need to understand why those protections are institutionally so important.

- c. Privacy is essential to free inquiry in the library because it enables library users to select, access, and consider information and ideas without fear of embarrassment, judgment, punishment, or ostracism. A lack of privacy in what one reads and views in the library can have a significant chilling effect upon library users' willingness to exercise their First Amendment right to read, thereby impairing free access to ideas. True liberty of choice in the library requires both a varied selection of materials and the assurance that one's choices are not monitored. All of these links and definitions come from the ALA website, so please go there for more information.

#### 9. Number 7

- a. Number 7: Help them know the laws applicable to public libraries. Once they have a foundation of principles of library service, they can tackle the laws behind them. While Wisconsin public library law is found in Chapter 43 of the statutes, a number of others commonly affect libraries and their boards as well. PI 06 is found in Administrative Code and details certification rules of library directors.
- b. Chapter 19 covers the duties of public officials, including public records law, open meetings, and code of ethics for public officials and employees. Chapter 35 outlines the duties of state document depository libraries. Chs 59-66 cover the requirements of municipalities, which may be nice to refer to when dealing with your municipality. Ch 70 has to do with property taxes, 102-112 pertains to employment law, such as minimum wages, child labor law, unemployment, and worker's comp. 563 covers raffle requirements, 895.48 is Wisconsin's good samaritan law, and 943 includes Theft of Library Materials.
- c. While those statutory references can occasionally be helpful, probably the next best resource after Chapter 43 is the Open Meetings Law Compliance Guide. It answers a lot of questions about transparency and open government, including closed session requirements. It is extremely helpful.
- d. Last, the Federal, employment law link goes to the New Director Boot Camp site, which Winnefox hosts for us. Feel free to use any of the resources on the boot camp site. This particular link covers HR issues like ADA and FMLA. It is definitely worth a look.

#### 10. Number 6

- a. Number 6: Encourage them-- or at least some of them-- to get engaged in professional organizations. If you are a small library, ARSL is a very dynamic and active national organization- it is the Association of Rural and Small Libraries. This is great for trustees because they will make connections with other trustees
- b. They may catch the bug! We all know that passion for libraries is contagious because we all caught it at some point in our lives. Their learning will come from

multiple perspectives, rather than just the director's POV. If they know and connect with other trustees, they may develop a better understanding of how good boards work and develop better habits.

#### 11. Number 5

- a. Number 5: Carve out some time for trustee training at board meetings. This training can be monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, or as needed. The Trustee Essentials were designed so that a director can pull out a module-- each are only a few pages long-- and go through them at a meeting. I realize that some of them need updating, but they are pretty helpful for an overview.
- b. Other essential documents that would be great for training sessions include OMLCG, PRLCG, your strategic plan, your policies, and even news topics that pertain to library issues. Also, your IFLS staff are a wealth of information, as are other systems' websites-- Winnefox and South Central Library System have extensive trustee training materials, just to name a few.

#### 12. Number 4

- a. Number 4: Teach them how to be a good boss. Bear in mind that you may have more experience managing staff than your boss does! Help them out.
- b. Lead by example. If you are doing quarterly performance reviews, let them know. Keep them aware of what you are doing, because they may have to go to bat for you and it always helps if they are aware of the situation.
- c. Many years ago I took a course in interpersonal communication. The professor of that class shared that Conflict equals unmet expectations. In other words, conflicts occur because one side or the other has a different vision of what was supposed to happen in a given situation. If you communicate with your board so that they have a true sense of what is happening, it will reduce the likelihood of conflicts.
- d. Last, if you believe that it is important to supervise and evaluate your staff, then you should value the same for you. Help them to do that because they may have never reviewed someone before. The link is to a resource from the system in Poughkeepsie, NY; it is really old but it looks at the board-director relationship as a partnership and the evaluation process focuses on the state of the library, which includes both the director and the board.

#### 13. Number 3

- a. Number 3: Instill the importance of investing in professional development for all staff. You know why this is important. Just reinforce that their jobs as trustees will be easier if you all are better at your jobs. Think of it in terms of good parenting: As you become more confident in your role and demonstrate good judgment, and your staff are increasingly competent, it may ease their desire to monitor/control/meddle, depending on what type of board you have.

#### 14. Number 2

- a. Number 2: Make sure they know the community-- and I mean all of it. Not just the white people; not just the ones who donate or use the library. There are two types of non-library users in this world: those that value the library as an

institution in our society but choose not to use it, and those that do not value the library because they believe that the library is antiquated and does not serve any purpose beyond what is already available from other sources. Just so we are clear, millennials and the generations that follow them are increasingly in the second category, and they are growing.

- b. Encourage them to join civic groups on behalf of the library, and support you doing the same. Make sure they tell people in those groups that they are a trustee of the library and why that is important. Create business cards for them so they can hand them out. Instill a little pride in the role they play. I remember the first time I watched a board member rattle off library statistics in defense of the library, while I was in the room and could have handled it. It was an amazing moment because I knew it meant much more coming from a lifelong resident, business owner, and pillar of the community than it did coming from the librarian.
- c. There is so much to community engagement that it cannot even possibly be put on a slide. There are many models that teach you to turn outward to your community, and one of our panelists is an expert on the topic. Cindy has a multi-year initiative dedicated to helping libraries become proficient in engagement. To know more about Wisconsin Libraries Transforming Communities, follow the link provided. Also, the iSchool in Madison has rescheduled their Lead the Way conference to November, with registration opening sometime this month. This is the very first library conference to specifically address community engagement. The response and content are stellar, so you should strongly consider going, and taking a trustee or two with you.
- d. So... are you ready for number 1?

#### 15. Number 1

- a. And here it is, number 1! Help them to understand that relationship-building is essential to the success of the library.
- b. This goes very much hand in hand with Tip number two regarding community engagement, but it IS a bit different, and of utmost importance right now, because we don't have a full understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 on the future.
- c. The importance of relationship-building, at least for our purposes today, is twofold. It is advocacy, but not JUST that. Relationship-building is necessary to ensure a secure future for the library. First, trustees should develop strong relationships with friends, foundations, and donors because you want those strong relationships to hold firm when the library needs funding and support for special projects, but also in times of challenge. For example, what happens when the Friends decide they want to spend money on uncomfortable, ugly furnishings like seating that the board does not want? Yes, the library board has exclusive control... relationships need to be stable-- built on trust and respect-- in order to withstand even these small challenges.

- d. Similarly, the library board should take this same relationship-building approach with the municipal governing body. We all know the importance of NOT only going to the municipality during budget season with our hands out. But, more than this, the municipality can be a great ally-- they are knowledgeable about HR and accounting issues, they can help finance an expansion, many have attorneys at hand, and partnerships with them can be critical to the community. And yes, while the library board MAY have certain authorities, autonomy is a MYTH because the library is interconnected with the municipal government in numerous ways, especially when it comes to funding and personnel-- arguably your two biggest assets.

16. Number 1 continued

- a. The second part is more self-serving, but it is equally important. In my position as consultant I hear from a number of library directors who "take on" the municipality and other organizations in the name of legal authority, only to find themselves on some sort of chopping block in the end. Remember that a library director should be thought of as the executor of the board's authority, and a strong and educated board understands the importance of protecting the director. Sometimes directors unwittingly put themselves in the middle of a conflict. Good relationship-building strengthens the board's position of authority and it also protects the director from being singled out in what largely ends up a personality conflict. Take it from me, it is very hard to undo that damage.

17. Conclusion