

Effective Board Meetings and Trustee Participation

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Preparation is Key

To a great extent, the work done *before* each library board meeting will determine the effectiveness of the board.

The board president and library director need to work together in preparing materials to be sent out to board members before each meeting. Typically, the library director will contact the library board president to discuss planned agenda subjects (including any items required because of previous board action). (See attached [Sample Board Meeting Agenda](#).) The board president is given the opportunity to add agenda items. Board members wishing to have an item brought before the board should contact their board president.

The library director is usually delegated the responsibility for drafting the agenda and other materials to be included in the board mailing. Those materials should include minutes of the previous meeting, the monthly financial report, monthly bills, a detailed agenda and any other background materials needed to adequately inform the board. Providing detailed written information to the board before meetings allows board members time to consider carefully the issues to be discussed at the meeting. In addition, mailing written reports to the board prior to the meeting (such as the director's report and any committee reports) will save valuable meeting time for board questions and discussion.

Board members can contribute best if they have taken the time to adequately study the agenda and background materials *before* each meeting.

Follow the Law

The Wisconsin open meetings law places specific requirements on the content and type of public notice to be made before every board or committee meeting. The law also requires that meetings be open to the public unless the board follows the legally required procedures to hold a closed session. (See [Trustee Essential #14: The Library Board and the Open Meetings Law](#) for more information.) Also, be sure to avoid conflict of interest situations. (See [Trustee Essential #16: Ethics and Conflict of Interest Laws Applying to Trustees](#) for more information.)

At Meetings

Effective board meetings can begin with a quick review of the agenda to make sure there is adequate time to cover all items and to modify the order of business if necessary. Effective board meetings move at an appropriate pace. Time for questions and full discussion is allowed, but the president makes sure discussion remains focused and decisions are reached. The president also needs to ensure that a few members do not dominate discussions, that all members have a chance to be heard, and that accountability for follow-through is assigned as needed.

In This Trustee Essential

- The keys to effective board meetings
- How individual trustees can contribute to the board and the library

Effective Decision-Making

It is important to keep in mind that legal responsibility for overall library operations rests in the library board, not individual trustees. Therefore, it is important for the board president to use leadership techniques that promote effective group decision-making on the part of the entire library board, not decision-making by a few board members, or the library director, or any other individual.

Board meetings are the place for you to raise questions and make requests of the library director and/or staff. Individual trustees should never make such requests or demands on their own—you are members of a governing body and must act as a body. Yet, as an individual trustee, you should not hesitate to raise concerns or questions at board meetings. By raising questions and/or concerns, you may help the board avoid rushing into an action without appropriate consideration of all of the ramifications or alternatives.

A “public comment” period during the meeting is not required, but it can be a helpful way for the board to hear about particular public concerns or needs. To avoid open meetings law violations, the board should limit itself to answering basic questions from the public and place any matter on a future meeting agenda if additional discussion or deliberation on the issue is needed. (See [Trustee Essential #14: The Library Board and the Open Meetings Law](#) for more information.)

More Legal Requirements

Wisconsin’s Public Records Law *requires* that written meeting minutes be kept and be made available to the public (see [Trustee Essential #15: The Library Board and the Public Records Law](#) for more information). At a minimum, meeting minutes must indicate board members present and all motions that were made and the result of any votes taken. Except for votes on the election of board officers, any board member can request that a roll call vote be taken on any vote, with the vote of each member recorded in the minutes.

Only legally appointed library board members can vote on board matters. Some library boards may consider certain officials *ex officio* board members, such as the library director or city manager. No official or any other person is an official library board member or is legally authorized to vote on library board matters unless he or she has been legally appointed according to the relevant portions of Chapter 43. (See [Trustee Essential #18: Library Board Appointments and Composition](#) for further details on the legally required process. [Trustee Essential #16: Ethics and Conflict of Interest Laws Applying to Trustees](#) discusses certain impermissible appointments under Wisconsin’s “incompatibility doctrine,” such as the appointment of a library director to the library board.)

Continuing Trustee Education

Board meetings can be an effective arena for continuing trustee education. For example, time could be set aside at a board meeting to review and discuss one of this series of *Trustee Essentials* or a chapter of the *Wisconsin Public Library*

Standards. Staff members can be invited to make presentations to inform the board more fully about library operations and services. Outside experts, such as municipal personnel specialists, elected officials, or public library system staff, can be invited to make presentations about areas of interest or concern to the library board. (See [Trustee Essential #27: Trustee Orientation and Continuing Education](#) for other ideas.)

Discussion Questions

1. Could our board better organize and use our meeting time? How?
2. How can we encourage all board members to contribute to board discussions?
3. Could we incorporate continuing education into our board meetings? Could the board use a “refresher” on certain issues? What issues?

Sources of Additional Information

- Your library system staff (See [Trustee Tool B: Library System Map and Contact Information](#).)
- Attached [Sample Board Meeting Agenda](#)
- Attached [Sample Annual Library Board Calendar](#)
- OWLS webpage on meetings at owlsnet.org/l4l/meetings (See especially the links on effective meetings.)
- *Robert’s Rules of Order* (latest edition) or *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* by Alice F. Sturgis, revised by the American Institute of Parliamentarians

Trustee Essentials: A Handbook for Wisconsin Public Library Trustees was prepared by the DLT with the assistance of the Trustee Handbook Revision Task Force.

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Sample Board Meeting Agenda

Below is a sample board meeting agenda. Wisconsin's open meetings law requires that the meeting notice include the time, date, place, and subjects to be discussed and/or acted upon at the meeting. (See [Trustee Essential #14: The Library Board and the Open Meetings Law](#) for more information on agenda, notice, and posting requirements of the law.)

NOTICE

Hometown Public Library Board Meeting

Date,
Time,
Place

Note: Please contact _____ at _____ if you need accommodations to attend the meeting.

1. Call to Order *Board President*
2. Roll call and introduction of guests *Board President*
3. Approval of minutes of previous meeting
[Provide copy of minutes to board members in advance of the meeting.]
4. Director's report and statistical report *Library Director*
[Provide copy of reports to board members in advance of the meeting.]
5. Financial report
Library Director and/or Board Treasurer or Financial Secretary
[Provide copy of report to board members in advance of the meeting.]
6. Audit and approval of monthly expenditures [Provide list of bills to board members in advance of the meeting.]
7. Committee reports or other reports [such as a report on legislative or other statewide issues] [Optional—include on agenda only if there is actually something to report]
8. Subject matter of issue to be considered by board [for example, "Consideration of revised library collection development policy"]
9. Additional issues to be considered by board [Be reasonably specific about all subject matters to be considered by board.]
10. Public comment period [This is not required, but it can be helpful for the board to hear about particular public concerns or needs. To avoid open meetings law violations, the board should limit itself to answering basic questions from the public and place the matter on a future meeting agenda if additional discussion or deliberation on the issue is needed.]

11. Board continuing education session to be held to review and discuss [for example] Trustee Essential #14: The Library Board and the Open Meetings Law
12. Roll call vote to hold **closed session** for board consideration of the performance evaluation and compensation of the library director as authorized by Wisconsin Statutes Section 19.85(1)(c).
13. Reconvene in open session
14. Approval of the performance evaluation and compensation of the library director.
15. Adjournment

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Sample Annual Library Board Calendar

(Note: The time frame for some of the activities listed below may be different for your library and municipality. Of course, your annual calendar should list the dates of your monthly library board meetings.)

January

- Director meets with personnel committee to review his/her annual goals and objectives and progress report on his/her prior year annual goals and objectives [see December].
- Board conducts annual performance review of director.

February

- Annual report reviewed, approved, and forwarded to municipal [or county] governing body, library system, and DLT.
- Nominating committee appointed.
- Appointing authority notified about upcoming expiring board terms and provided with a list of board-recommended appointees.

March

- March 1. Due date for libraries to receive county payments as required by Wisconsin Statutes Section 43.12.
- Library strategic plan and technology plan reviewed and revised, if necessary. Discussion of budgetary implications of plan activities that are scheduled for next year.

April

- April 1. Due date for a consolidated county public library providing notice to any public library from which it plans to request a payment.
- Appointments of new board members made by the municipality/county.
- Provide prior year usage and expenditure statistics to county [or to system or county library board to compile the statistics and forward them to county] as required by Wisconsin Statutes Section 43.12. Necessary statistics are due to county by July 1.
- Continue discussion of budget goals/needs for next year.

May

- May 1. New member board terms begin.
- Orientation sessions held for new board members.
- Board annual meeting held, board officers elected.
- Director provides board with preliminary recommendations for budget priorities for coming year, and recommended adjustments to staff salary schedule. Board discusses, revises (if necessary), and approves preliminary recommendations for budget priorities for coming year.

June

- Director provides board with draft budget for coming year. Board discusses and directs any needed changes.

July

- July 1. Due date for providing prior year usage and expenditure statistics to county.
- Budget and funding request approved for upcoming year.

August

- Discussion of needed trustee continuing education.

September

- Municipalities that levy a tax for public library service apply for an exemption from next year's county library levy.
- Board representatives attend municipal [or county] budget hearings to explain and advocate for budget.

October

- Library policies reviewed and revised, if necessary.
- Trustee continuing education session held during meeting.
- Municipality [or county] approves library appropriation.

November

- Budget revised, if necessary, based on actual funding approved.
- Library policies reviewed and revised if necessary.
- Strategic planning committee appointed, if necessary, and given charge and timetable.
- Trustee continuing education session held during meeting.

December

- Director provides board with his/her annual goals and objectives and progress report on his/her prior year annual goals and objectives.
- Trustee continuing education session held during meeting.