

# Trustee Training

Chapter 4  
Effective Board Meetings and Trustee Participation

## 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.

## 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## 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.
- 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.

## 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.
- 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 In This Trustee Essential® The keys to effective board meetings § How individual trustees can contribute to the board and the library TE4-2 Trustee Essentials: A Handbook for Wisconsin Public Library Trustees 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.

## More Legal Requirements

- Wisconsin's Public Records Law requires that written meeting minutes be kept and be made available to the public.
- 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.

## More Legal Requirements

- 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.

## 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?
4. Could the board use a “refresher” on certain issues? What issues?