

Trustee Training

Chapter 2

Powers and Duties

Wisconsin Statutes under Section 43.58, which is titled "Powers and Duties." The primary responsibilities of trustees assigned here include:

- Exclusive control of all library expenditures.
- Purchasing of a library site and the erection of the library building when authorized.
- Exclusive control of all lands, buildings, money, and property acquired or leased by the municipality for library purposes.
- Supervising the administration of the library and appointing a librarian.
- Prescribing the duties and compensation of all library employees.

Powers and Duties

- Compared with other appointed boards, library boards have extraordinary powers and responsibilities.
- In providing this governance structure for libraries, the legislature was attempting to keep library operations under direct citizen control and as far as possible outside the political sphere of government.

Responsibilities of Director

His or her duties include (but are not limited to):

1. Overseeing the library budget and preparing reports as required by the board.
2. Managing of library collections, including selecting all library material according to policies approved by the board, oversight of the cataloging and classification of library material, and the operation of automated systems.
3. Hiring, training, supervising, and scheduling other library personnel.
4. Supervising circulation of material and record keeping.
5. Cooperating with the board, community officials, and groups in planning library services and publicizing library programs within the community.
6. Supervising the maintenance of all library facilities and equipment.

Division of Labor

- The library board decides what services the library will provide and to what lengths the director and his or her staff may go to provide those services. However, it is up to the director, as the hired professional, to create the procedures needed to carry out the policies of the board and ensure that services are provided effectively and efficiently.
- Except in extreme situations, library trustees should not discuss library business with employees other than the director. The library board may solicit library staff input on the director's performance as part of a formal evaluation process.

Division of Labor

- Administration of the budget and expenditure of funds is a frequent source of misunderstanding regarding the division of labor between boards and directors. Section 43.58(2) states that "The library board shall audit and approve all expenditures of the public library."
- The library board must review expenditures and keep an eye on the flow of funds, but should trust the judgment of the director when it comes to which books to purchase or which is the most economical office supply vendor.

Municipal Involvement

- When the director, or his authorized staff, makes a purchase of material or service, an invoice is received from the vendor. The director will then prepare a group of invoices for review at the monthly meeting of the library board.
- Usually, the director will also provide a list of the invoices along with a financial statement indicating how much money will be left in each line of the budget after payment is made. According to Wisconsin Statutes Section 43.58(2), "The library board shall audit and approve all expenditures" and forward these to the appropriate municipal or county financial officer. The municipal or county officer must then pay the bill.

Municipal Involvement

- One final point on finances: while the library board has full authority over the expenditure of funds, the municipality holds the money.
- For example, the library director will attend department-head meetings with other administrators. He or she may attend city council meetings and give a report. The library may provide services on behalf of the municipality, such as maintaining the village webpage. Just as the municipality is a partner in providing library service, the library can be a strong partner in providing municipal service to the community.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the pros and cons of citizen board control of the library?
2. How are requests for expenditures presented and approved at your library?
3. Who prepares the first draft of the library budget?
4. What is the education and background of your director?
5. How do library personnel and/or the board interact with your local government?
6. How can the library board promote a positive relationship with the municipality?
7. How involved, or uninvolved, is your director with the community and municipal government?
8. How is the annual budget and funding request presented to your municipal government?
