

Trustee Topic 17

Membership in the Library System

History

- To address the limitations of relying solely on local support and local coordination of library service, the Wisconsin legislature passed legislation in 1971 enabling the creation of regional public library systems.
- The basic dynamic of library system membership is simple, yet the results can be powerful: a public library agrees to certain membership requirements, including the agreement to serve all system residents equitably; in return, the library system provides a wide range of primarily state-funded services that enhance local library service.

Cooperation vs. Competition

- Competition among municipalities, counties, and other divisions of government is common. Unfortunately, that competition often leads to missed opportunities for cooperation, resource sharing, and economies of scale through cooperative projects.
- Libraries, through library systems, have embraced cooperation instead of competition, and local library users (and taxpayers) are the beneficiaries.

Membership Requirements for Libraries

- Your library must be established and operated according to the requirements of Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 43.
- Your county must belong to the library system and must meet the system membership requirements for counties.
- Your municipal governing body (or county board for a consolidated county public library) must approve a resolution authorizing your library to participate in the library system.

Membership Requirements for Libraries

- Your library board must approve an agreement with the library system to participate in the system and its activities, participate in interlibrary loan of materials with other system libraries, and provide to all residents of the system the same services, on the same terms, that you provide to local residents.
- You must employ a library director with the appropriate certification from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and whose employment requires that he or she be present in the library for at least 10 hours of each week that the library is open to the public, less leave time.

Membership Requirements for Libraries

- . Beginning in 2008, your library annually must be open to the public an average of at least 20 hours each week except that for a library in existence on June 3, 2006, is open to the public an average of at least 20 hours or the number of hours each week that the library was open to the public in 2005, whichever is fewer.
- Beginning in 2008, your library annually spends at least \$2,500 on library materials.

Required System Services

- In order to receive state aid library systems must provide:
 - Technology and resource sharing planning, referral or routing of reference and interlibrary loan requests, electronic delivery of information and physical delivery of library materials, training for member library staff and trustees , professional consultant services, support for library service to users with special needs, backup reference, information, and interlibrary loan services from the system resource library, planning with other types of libraries in the system area, service agreements with all adjacent library systems, and agreements with each member library that require those libraries to serve all residents of the system area on the same basis as local residents.

Required System Services

- The Division for Libraries and Technology monitors compliance with these requirements. Each library system is allowed considerable flexibility in developing specific library system service programs so that each system can best meet the needs of the residents of its particular geographical area and the needs of its member libraries.

How to Be a Good System Member

- Your library system must respond to the needs of system member libraries and the residents of the system area. This can be a very difficult task, often requiring the balancing of many competing needs and interests.
- Your library can help the library system with this difficult task by communicating your local needs effectively and constructively and by cooperating in system planning and problem-solving activities. Your board can help by encouraging your library staff to attend system workshops and contribute their time and talents to system committees.
- Your board should also budget for paid staff time and travel costs for these activities.

How to Be a Good System Member

- Your board may also decide that your library should participate in shared system services and cooperative activities. Cooperation can often result in better, more cost-effective services to the public—as well as services that would not even be possible without cooperation.
- You, as an individual trustee, can also benefit from attendance at system workshops and can contribute to the strength and success of the system by volunteering to serve on your library system's board and/or the system's advisory and planning committees.

Discussion Questions

1. What are examples of ways your community's residents have benefited from library system services?
2. What are examples of ways your system could better serve your library and your community's residents? How can you and/or your library board influence your system to do those things?