



Five Ways ALTA Can Help Your Library

1. Legislation

ALTA works closely with the other divisions of the American Library Association in promoting legislation in the interest of better library service. The Library Services and Construction Act, the act creating the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the bills authorizing and funding the White House Conference on Libraries--are all the result of joint efforts of librarians and trustees through association.

2. Tools

- a. Literature--ALTA acquires or develops and then distributes the best available published information in the fields of library policy, personnel, buildings, programs and evaluation from the trustee point of view.
- b. Periodicals--ALTA publishes the ALTA NEWSLETTER several times a year to keep members informed of activities and developments of importance to trustees.
- c. Audiovisuals--ALTA encourages production and participates in

the exchange of audiovisual aids supporting good trusteeship.

3. Programs

At annual conferences and occasionally in regional settings, ALTA programs include lively presentations, debates, dramatizations and workshops on topics relevant to trustees. Many are later packaged for replication at state or regional levels.

4. Speakers

ALTA officers and speakers bureau members have expertise in many areas of current library activity. They will travel, speak and conduct workshops aimed at meeting trustee needs.

5. Recognition

An ALTA jury selects outstanding trustees annually for citation by the American Library Association. In addition, the ALTA Awards Committee identifies and assists local communities in giving due public recognition to major benefactors of libraries.

Duties, Functions and Responsibilities of Public Library Trustees

The following listing stems from library law but is essentially more closely allied with the traditions of service that have come to be generally agreed upon among library trustees. It is based on a study of the publications that constitute the basic literature of library trusteeship (see bibliography below). These publications have in almost every case been developed by trustees, for trustees.

- A. Attend Board meetings.
- B. Employ a competent and qualified librarian at an adequate salary.
- C. Provide an adequate and qualified staff to work with the librarian.
- D. Establish conditions of employment and provide for the welfare of the staff.
- E. Provide for building and space needs and maintain the library's property.

- F. Study the programs and needs of the library in relation to the community by keeping informed on community changes, trends, needs and interests.
- G. Determine the purposes and objectives of the library and reexamine them periodically.
- H. Determine and adopt written policies to govern the operation and program of the library and assign their execution to the librarian and the staff.
- I. Study, adopt and implement a clearcut policy and procedure in the area of book selection and censorship.
- J. Establish rules and regulations governing the use of the library, upon the recommendation of the librarian.
- K. See that accurate records are kept on file at the library.
- L. Secure adequate funds from the appropriating agency, and from new sources if necessary, to carry out the library's program and to make the objectives for constantly improved service a reality.
- M. Administer gifts of money and property according to the terms of bequests.
- N. Assist in the preparation of an annual budget.
- O. Establish, support and participate in a vital public relations program for the library.
- P. Report regularly to the governing officials and to the general public.
- Q. Coordinate library activities with those of public officials, civic groups and other community organizations.
- R. Contribute special knowledge of the community to library staff members so they can effectively serve the community that supports the library.
- S. Know state, local and federal library laws.
- T. Actively support state and national library legislation that improves and extends library service.
- U. Know and understand the resources available through the statewide library development program and study the advantages of participation in the program.
- V. Keep abreast of public library standards and library trends.
- W. Arrange, aid, encourage and attend regional, state and national trustee meetings and workshops for a fuller

utilization of trustee talent and experience.

- X. Affiliate with professional organizations.
- Y. Be knowledgeable about the services and activities of the state library extension agency.
- Z. Encourage the recruitment of library personnel by assisting library agencies in their activities and by placing materials for recruitment in the hands of educational institutions.

Sources

The list of duties, functions and responsibilities of public library trustees was synthesized from the following publications:

The Library Trustee: A Practical Guidebook, by Virginia Young. New York: R. R. Bowker, 2d ed., 1968.

"The Trustee of a Small Public Library," by Virginia Young. Small Library Project Pamphlet, no.3. Chicago: Library Administration Division, American Library Association, 1962.

A Handbook for Library Trustees, by Marian Manley Winser, 2d ed. New York: R. R. Bowker, 1959.

"Model Manual for Library Trustees," by the Action Development Committee of the American Library Trustee Association. Chicago: American Library Trustee Association, American Library Association, 1961.

The trustee manuals and handbooks published by the trustee organizations and/or state library extension agencies in many of the states including: Illinois, New Jersey, Iowa, Missouri, Louisiana, Oregon, Idaho, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Wisconsin.

Edward G. Strable
Former Executive Secretary
American Library Trustee Association
American Library Association
50 E. Huron St.
Chicago, IL 60611

Library Trustee Guidelines

Much trustee literature is burdened with rationale and semantics; the following guidelines are a point of departure . . .

by Jack Short

An examination of the state of library trusteeship today would show that of America's sixty thousand library trustees most are functioning with a limited grasp of the implications of their trusteeship. It is natural that this be so in that library trustees represent a wide and diversified range of background and experience.

The quality of our library trusteeship effort can be enhanced if we effectively utilize the insights and experience of other trustees.

Much of the current library trustee literature is heavily burdened with rationale and exercises in semantics. The following guidelines have been stripped of excess verbiage and are simply a point of departure for further discussion and amplification. There is no significance to the sequence of items. Some points are obvious--some perhaps new to you. What is important is to creatively relate them to your library board needs.

- Resign from the library board if you cannot give adequately of your time.
- Be aware of the implications of modern library service. Too many libraries are nothing more than charming reading rooms.
- Many trustees do not understand their function. Confusion is endless as they meddle in staff scheduling and bending rules for friends, but ignore their responsibility for planning policy, anticipating trends (with the help of the librarian) and supporting their librarian in times of stress.
- Pay librarians professional salaries and in return demand professional competence.
- Thoroughly understand your budget. Don't reluctantly release funds in a miserly fashion but rather freely send them forth based on the knowledge that an informed, talented professional has pegged them for a well-defined need.
- Do not undermine administrative effectiveness by placing yourself between director and staff.
- Much potential library service is denied communities because trustees meet and make decisions entirely independent of the librarians' participation.
- When making decisions, define the problem, expectations, and alternative solutions. Know what to do once the decision is reached.
- Visit nearby libraries. On occasion sit in on their board meetings.
- The trustee must take an aggressive and dynamic role in the pursuit of library legislation.
- Encourage staff to present solutions--not problems.
- Develop orientation programs for new trustees. Encourage the development of a trustee manual.
- Library board terms should be staggered to reflect new and old membership. Avoid the self-perpetuating board.
- Library service must be for everyone and all segments of the community should be represented on the library board.
- The library director who fails to exercise leadership and tolerates poor standards of library service should be replaced. Your participation in state, regional, and national trustee meetings will aid you in making this evaluation.
- Read professional publications such as Library Journal and American Libraries.
- Many trustees are the result of prestige or political appointments and really are not library oriented. They have little contribution to make, yet they will not resign. Most of them cause no trouble, but progress and real service in this day of the hard dollar are handicapped by their apathy.
- Hiring a new director is one of the most important tasks of the trustee. Take your time and have lots of indepth conversations with the candidates. Remember that a library science degree does not automatically produce a professional librarian.
- Unions are a fact of life for some libraries. Keep informed.

- Often too much time is spent looking for the answer instead of the problem.
- A librarian must understand his community. This mandates times away from the library building and being out in the community.
- Library needs, unlike paintings, are never completed. Library needs are always in a state of flux. Do not be turned aside by that flux and turmoil, but rather respond to it.
- Know well the role of the library but know well also the missions and capabilities of other institutions that make up the educational communications milieu.
- Expanding knowledge and limited funding mandate institutional centralization. Support planning that leads to maximum library service for the greatest number of persons.
- Meet with elected State representatives often enough so that they know your library's needs.
- Be aware of library standards and how your particular library compares.
- Be wary of discussing problems instead of solving them.
- Avoid excessive and unneeded committee meetings.
- On an individual basis give financial support to the Washington Office of the American Library Association.
- Well-defined library policies are a must. Regular analysis of established policies is essential to a growing and vital library.
- The dialogue at board meetings is often nothing more than the rearranging of deck chairs on the Titanic. Are you guilty?
- The library represents individualized service in a mass society. Individualized service demands a multitude of approaches. Keep the open mind.
- Take calculated risks based on sound decision-making.
- The library is not a place--it is a process.
- Use the resources of your State Library. It is imperative that the state provide supportive services to library trustees.
- Ask for the rationale behind expenditures but do not fall into trap of being a pseudo-professional.
- How do we energize creative thinking at the dull, tedious, everyday, basic level of library operations? This is where progress will be made, not in grandiose schemes.
- There is often a lack of honest communication between librarian and trustee.
- Libraries need operative plans which include a grasp of highly volatile short range objectives and long range goals.
- Expand your vision to grasp the full dimension of what library service can be.
- Don't depend on facts alone. They are all in the past.
- Unwritten policies represent one of the greatest dangers for library boards.
- Agitate for reasonable funding of libraries at the local, State, and national levels.
- Be aware of the need for professional public relations activities.
- Avoid administrative strait-jacketing. Know the implications of your trusteeship. Keep exploring and probing.
- Meaningful agendas lead to good meetings. Avoid a routine design and allow time for in-depth discussions of library concerns.
- Promote the establishment of Friends of the Library groups.
- Don't let your response always be that of reaction to a situation or condition. Use dynamic and creative thinking to improve the library before problems arise.
- It is as dangerous to decide too soon as too late.
- Librarian and library trustee are not in separate pursuits. We share a common objective. We are together, hoping and striving to improve the society in which we live.

Reprinted with permission from PLA Bulletin, March, 1975, pp. 29-30.

Mr. Short is a past-president of the American Library Trustee Association and served as president of the Association of Connecticut Library Boards, chairman of the Connecticut State Library Advisory Council and Regional Manager for Coronet Instructional Materials, a division of Esquire, Inc.