



Tales from a New Trustee

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Library System

Working in Committees

Committee Work in General

The role of a library Trustee, as I discussed in a previous column, is not limited to attending board meetings. While boards differ in their approach to committee work, at some time in your Trustee experience you're going to wind up on a committee.

My own board tends to operate as a committee of the whole on most issues — we have no separate finance committee, for example. Most of our committees are set up as small, two-person, ad hoc committees for a specific project or task. I've served on a committee to revise our board travel policy, for example, and to coordinate the evaluation of our executive director.

Other boards may have half a dozen regular committees, such as finance, policy, personnel, board development, and an executive committee, with two to three members on each group. These committees may meet on a regular basis or as needed, and may meet on different days than board. Check the open meeting laws in your state to find out whether or not committee meetings are public and must be posted.

However your board chooses to organize, there will almost certainly be a time when you serve on a committee. This is an important part of your duty as a library Trustee, so be sure that you participate fully in whatever committee to which you are appointed.

Chairing a Building Committee

Part of the rationale behind this series of columns is for me to explore all of the different things that I experienced as a new Trustee, including some issues that all happened to occur early in my tenure that many Trustees may never have experienced at all, even with many years of on the board. Since



A building committee helped oversee a new facility for Fountaindale Public Library, now under construction and set to open February 2011.

my appointment in 2008 and election to a full term in 2009, I've had to learn very rapidly.

Libraries are governmental buildings that generally last 20, 30, or 50 years or more. Depending on the growth of the community, the need for expansion, and whether funding is available or not, building a brand new main library, a new branch library, or extensively remodeling an existing facility may be a process with which the average Trustee has not been involved. In my case, this has been a major portion of my library involvement.

I had been actively supporting the idea of building a new library in Bolingbrook in 2006 and 2007. I was recruited to chair the citizens group that advocated for a "YES" vote when the library district went to referendum in early 2008. We worked hard, against some opposition, and passed the referendum by 49 votes out of approximately 15,000 votes cast. Two days after the official vote total was released, I was appointed as a Trustee to fill a vacancy on the board. That same night I was appointed to chair the building committee. Little did I know how much work that would entail.

Our first building committee meeting was held 11 days later, so I jumped right in. I had been given about three hours of orientation to the library the week before. I had previously chaired a \$1 million remodel of my church in 1990-1994, so I did have a little bit of experience, but now we were planning a \$44 million brand new building! The task looked pretty challenging, to say the least.

How We Started

During the three to four years prior to passage of the referendum, the library had studied the need for a new facility, engaged an architect, and contracted with a company to serve as the owner's representative in dealing with the architect and construction contractors. There had been discussions of remodeling or expanding the current building, or building a totally new facility. After agreeing on a new building as the goal, the architects drew up a concept plan for the exterior, and very rough layouts for the interior based on the program plans the library had previously come up with. We also had an estimated budget. That's what we had when we went to referendum. After getting the go-ahead, we needed to get organized.

Our building committee was established to guide the process of completing planning, getting construction done, and moving into the new library. We chose to have two Trustees on the committee, along with the library director and two other library staff members, plus the owner's representative and the architects. This was the group that would agree on issues and bring matters to the board that needed full board approval. While we've changed the personnel slightly, this is essentially the group that is still operating in 2010.

Following some early retirements in early 2008, we had several new department heads. The committee determined that we should tour some of the larger area libraries that had been built in the past five years. We brought all the department heads with us to observe. We wanted to know what worked for these libraries and what didn't work for them. The libraries we chose were gracious to allow us to visit and tour their facilities, both public and staff. After those seven library visits, the staff reworked their needs analysis and worked with the architect to redefine the library's interior spaces. Once that was done, the architects started to draw plans.

Once the plans were approved,



there were decisions to make on furniture, exterior and interior finishes, equipment needs, and many other items. Some decisions were made by staff, some by the building committee, and some by full board approval. We spent a lot of time pre-qualifying general contractors, including two full days to interview ten firms and ultimately select six as qualified bidders. There continues to be issues that crop up all through construction, and the building committee discusses them.

Realizing this would be a formidable task, I've kept track of my time spent working as chair of the building committee. In the 26 months since we started, I've personally spent about 11 hours a month on committee meetings, library tours, background reading, e-mails about committee business, phone calls, discussions with our village officials, along with groundbreaking and topping out ceremonies.

Admittedly, most of the really hard work is done by staff and the construction professionals, who have spent many more hours on this project than I have. But this particular committee has definitely been a major commitment for my fellow Trustee and me.

We look forward to opening our new three-story library in February 2011, although it will be later in the year before we can tear down the old building, complete the parking lots, and finish all of the landscaping. For a long time, the committee work seemed very theoretical, when all we had were drawings. Now that we're in the middle of construction, the project is real and all the time spent on the committee seems very worthwhile.

Not everyone will have the chance to serve on building committee for a major project — I'm very lucky that it has happened to me! But most Trustees will serve on a committee or two, so take your responsibilities to heart and work hard to accomplish your committee's tasks. Your library will benefit from all of your hard work.

E-mail comments to altaff@ala.org to be forwarded to Dave Hargett.

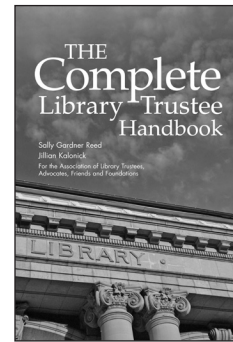
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ALTAFF Executive Director and former public library director Sally Gardner Reed draws on her years of success working with and consulting for Trustees to provide Trustees with straightforward, easy-to-read guidance on how to make the most of their vital role. She guides readers through important issues, including sustainable fundraising and advocacy, hiring a library director, strategic planning, director-Trustee collaboration, and policy development.

Readers of *The Complete Library Trustee Handbook* will be brought up to speed on optimizing board effectiveness, board ethics issues, conflicts of interest, and efficient meeting management. A chapter on key issues for libraries addresses intellectual freedom, user privacy, pay equity for library workers, privatization of public libraries, and funding.

Midwest Book Review calls *The Complete Library Trustee Handbook* "...a solid guide to help library trustees in their efforts to procure resources



that the library most needs to serve its community... *The Complete Library Trustee Handbook* lives up to its title. An absolute 'must-have' for library trustees; even those who have served for years

will encounter a wealth of valuable ideas, insights, and recommendations in this highly accessible and serviceable guide."

ALTAFF members and affiliates can order the new *The Complete Library Trustee Handbook* for \$35 — \$20 off the retail price. The price includes Media Mail shipping. Visit www.ala.org/altaff and click on "Products & Services" then "Publications" for an order form.

Members and affiliates can also request to be invoiced by faxing the printable order form available online or by calling the ALTAFF office at (800) 545-2433, ext. 2161.

Non-members may purchase the book for \$55 through Neal-Schuman Publishers (www.neal-schuman.com).

ALTAFF to present Trustee Academy in October

ALTAFF is very excited to announce that it will be providing a series of courses to help Trustees become exceptionally proficient in their roles on behalf of their libraries.

The courses, which will be offered online this fall, will include topics such as Trustee Basics (including understanding your role as a Trustee, ethics for board members, intellectual freedom and your library, and patrons' right to privacy); Holding Effective Board Meetings; Working Well With Your Director; Understanding the Library's Budget; Advocating for Your Library; and Setting Policies and Upholding Standards.

All of the online courses will be taught by a professional in the field and will be priced both a la carte so attendees can pick and choose what courses are important to them, and as a full curriculum that will reflect discounted pricing per course. In addition, entire Boards of Trustees can sign up for further discounts.

Registration and complete course outline and pricing will be available in September, and courses will begin in October. Don't miss this important opportunity to become the very best library Trustee you can be! For more information, visit www.ala.org/altaff and click on "Trustees."