

# **TRUSTEE TOPICS**

Prepared by the  
Kansas State Library and the  
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## **RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF TRUSTEES**

### **GOAL:**

The goal of this KLTA guideline is to help library directors and trustees build strong, effective library boards that have committed board members who can contribute a wide variety of political, professional and social skills.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Kansas Library Trustee Association has had rapid growth in the past several years. They have canvassed Kansas library trustees and identified a number of their concerns and priorities. High among these priorities is the need for guidelines in the recruitment and selection of excellent board members.

Board member recruitment can be difficult, especially in small communities where the number of potential trustees is so much smaller. Too many libraries are resorting to marketing the job as undemanding, rather than the critically important position and genuine honor that it ought to be.

Kansas libraries also need to have trustee orientation programs that will help new trustees learn about the library and begin doing their new job effectively.

### **ISSUES:**

The director and the existing board should all be trained to stay on watch for community residents that would make good board members. Examples might include political leaders, community leaders, successful

professional people, successful businessmen, church leaders, organization leaders, active mothers of school age children.

Skills that trustees like to have represented on the library board include:

- accounting skills
- advocacy skills
- business skills
- education background
- fundraising skills
- knowledge of funding issues
- knowledge of tax regulations
- legal knowledge
- marketing and public relations skills
- public speaking skills

The board should learn who the heavy library users are. They often know the library well and have strong feelings about its public support.

If the community has a major employer, the company's top officials should be considered as board members. They have business skills and they have good reason to care about quality of life for community residents.

The staff of local media can be good board members and effective allies in maintaining public awareness of the library.

Those in the service professions are often overlooked as potential board members. Those who serve the children, the senior citizens and citizens with special needs can offer valuable information about the total community and its information needs. They are also sensitive to the impact of inadequate funding.

In some communities, those who work in the recreational and tourist fields are a resource that should not be overlooked. Not only do they have a different perspective on the community but they often have marketing skills.

If the library has an active and successful Friends group, this can serve as a training ground for library trustees. The Friends group can also be a way for former trustees to remain involved with the library.

Most of the citizens appointed to the library board are capable of being effective board members if they have effective orientation and training. Very rarely, a new board member may have an inappropriate agenda for the budget or the collection. It may take a united board to politely but firmly demonstrate that the commitment to good financial support or intellectual freedom will remain in place.

#### ACTION STEPS:

The director and the board chair, or another trustee interested in board development, should meet with the appointing official to discuss the skills and qualities the library needs in its trustees. The appointing official should be given job descriptions of the trustee positions and a copy of the same orientation kit that will be given to new trustees. The appointing official should be encouraged to market library board membership as an important job rather than an easy one.

Throughout the year, the director should report to the board members about library users and library supporters who would make good board members.

Throughout the year, the trustees should talk to the director about community leaders who would make good board members.

The library board might consider asking potential board members to fill out an application form to gain more background information on the individual's interests and abilities and to send a signal that the job is an important one.

The position of library trustee should be marketed as a job that is critical to library development and a very important service to the community. Potential board members should not be told that "you just have to attend a monthly meeting." That simply isn't true in any good public library.