

# TRUSTEE TOPICS

Prepared by the  
Kansas State Library and the  
Kansas Library Trustee Association

## STAFF COMPENSATION

### GOAL:

The goal of this KLTA guideline is to help trustees build excellent library service by recruiting and retaining good staff. A capable, talented and committed staff is the single biggest factor in excellent public library service.

### BACKGROUND:

Kansas has much to be proud of in the field of public library development. The Kansas Library Trustee Association was formed to foster library trustee development and has grown to over 600 members. The state has strong library systems and good library training programs for all levels of library staff. The Kansas library community has made good progress with library technology and Kansas libraries have an unusually strong presence on the Internet.

But Kansas public libraries lose too many good library staff members to other occupations. Kansas loses too many MLS librarians to other occupations or to other states. Kansas public library salaries are too often inadequate to support the skills and abilities that Kansas librarians must develop in the information age.

Staff compensation should be a top priority for any public library, comprising 60 to 70% of the total budget. While collections in small libraries can be strengthened through clever community fundraising, staff compensation needs to be supported by stable public support.

Library boards have been known to work for years to create a staff compensation package that included improved salaries and reasonable benefits. But that kind of commitment requires a realistic knowledge of what the library staff does and what they have to offer.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

*Employee benefit fund* - K.S.A. 12-16,102 gives authority to establish a public library employee benefit fund which is a separate and additional levy from the general library levy. Municipal libraries must request the governing body to establish an employee benefit levy. For district and regional libraries, a resolution must be passed by the library board.

*LEEP (Library Employee Education Program) certification* - The Kansas State Library maintains a database of continuing education contact hours for Kansas library staff members. As they accumulate LEEP hours, library staff qualify for LEEP certification awards. These awards run from Level One for 30 contact hours to Level Six for 600 contact hours. LEEP certifications are not academic credentials but they are widely used in performance appraisals and resume building.

*KPLACE* is a three year training program for library directors and administrative staff who do not have the MLS degree. KPLACE certification supplies 90 contact hours of library training targeted at the needs of directors and administrators. KPLACE is sponsored by the ESU School of Library and Information Management, the Kansas State Library and the Kansas library systems.

*The MLS degree* is the Master of Library Science degree obtained by librarians who want to advance their library careers into higher administrative or specialized library positions. When awarded from an ALA-accredited university program, the MLS is the nationally recognized standard for professional library training.

## **ISSUES:**

It is the responsibility of the library board to know what the library director and staff bring to the library in education, training, talents, abilities and commitments.

It is the responsibility of the library director to realistically market his or her assets to the board during the evaluation process. It is also the responsibility of the library director to acknowledge weaknesses and present strategies for improvement.

It is the responsibility of the library director to realistically market the assets and accomplishments of the library staff and to evaluate the library's staff compensation package in relation to those assets and accomplishments.

Education and training credentials offered by public library staff often include:

- top level LEEP certifications
- KPLACE certification
- MLS degree
- other relevant degrees such as business administration.

Skills and abilities offered by public library staff often include:

- accounting and fiscal management
- personnel management
- volunteer management
- community leadership skills
- professional knowledge of print and electronic reference resources
- professional collection management skills
- special training and abilities in library technology
- web publishing skills
- marketing and public relations
- fundraising
- training in leadership through community programs
- public speaking skills
- storytelling skills
- writing skills

It is the responsibility of the library board, with the help of the library director, to review the salaries paid locally to municipal department heads, teachers and school library media specialists.

If the library director has good training and good skills but the salary is below the salary listed in *Compensation Guidelines for Kansas Public Library Directors*, the library's budget is too low. In mid-size and large libraries the same assessment is needed for library department heads.

ALL paid library staff should be paid an hourly wage that equals or exceeds the current minimum wage established by law. The current minimum wage can be confirmed with a call to the regional system consultant or the public library consultant at the Kansas State Library.

### **ACTION STEPS:**

The library board should have a schedule and procedure for annual or semi-annual review of the library director's position. The library director should have a schedule and procedure for semi-annual or quarterly review of each staff position.

The library director and library board should create salary schedules for all staff positions that provide for regular cost-of-living increases. Merit increases should be considered by the library board for superior performance and significant accomplishments in continuing education and in-service training.

The library director and board should thoroughly review the staff compensation package every two years, confirming that the administrative salary is in line with the recommended salary in the *Compensation Guidelines for Kansas Public Library Directors* or that incremental progress is being made toward the recommended salary. Other salaries should be confirmed as competitive with other local salaries paid for comparable responsibilities.

If the library does not have an employee benefit fund or have library staff included in the employee benefit fund of the municipality, these options should be seriously investigated by the library board. Information on establishing an employee benefit fund is available in the *Kansas Public Library Handbook*, pp 29-36, Kansas State Library, 1998. Assistance may also be obtained from regional system personnel or from the public library consultant at the Kansas State Library.

If the library's compensation package is determined to be inadequate, the library board should work with the library director, the regional system staff and the state library consultants to plan a strategy for raising the library budget through increased tax support and/or increased municipal support.

If the library board is temporarily unable to provide competitive compensation, the trustees should thoughtfully consider other ways to show appreciation to a good library staff. These can include:

- one time bonus payments
- extra days off
- board recognition for special accomplishments in performance or continuing education
- public recognition of an "exceptional" performance rating.

## **SOURCES:**

The Kansas Library Association Public Library Standards Committee has researched library salaries in Kansas and in the United States and prepared the *Compensation Guidelines for Kansas Public Library Directors*. These guidelines have been endorsed by the Kansas State Library Advisory Commission, the Kansas Library Trustee Association and the regional library systems.

## **TIPS FOR SALARY NEGOTIATIONS**

**- Build the case.** *The director and trustees should work with system and state library consultants to build the case for higher salaries. There must be a track record that reflects:*

- professional growth*
- skills that are valuable to the community and*
- accomplishments that have benefited the community*

*in order to justify higher salaries. The more people who are contributing information to the justification for higher salaries, the stronger it is likely to be.*

**- Do the homework.** The trustees should investigate the salaries paid for comparable work in county government, city government, banks, hospitals and schools. There should be evidence that hourly wages below a certain level will not retain qualified, professional library administrators when the library is competing with other employers.

**- Use the Compensation Guidelines for Kansas Public Library Directors.** These guidelines list recommended salaries for competent directors of Kansas public libraries. They are based on the market value of the skills and education needed for the positions and on the populations served. They are not based on current Kansas library budgets. If it is not feasible to offer the compensation recommended in the compensation guidelines, there should be incremental progress toward that goal.

**- Be polite but persistent.** It is understandable that local governments should sometimes feel economic constraint. But the library board can show real commitment to the library staff by talking to local government, building their case and returning to talk again. Salary negotiations are not usually a one-day project.

**- Stay together.** The library board should act as a committee of the whole to negotiate for better salaries. They should make it evident that this is a public library priority and not the pet project of one or two people.

**- Have the support of the community.** If the library is visibly essential to the community, it is easier to win support for professional salaries. In some situations, it may be wise to gather written support from community leaders and heavy library users to confirm the library's value to the community.

**- Document the skills it takes to run the library.** Community leaders need to understand the skills it takes to run a modern public library. Public library boards are encouraged to use volunteers to help the library with programs and special projects. But it takes trained professionals to skillfully handle all aspects of library technology, fiscal management and collection development. Volunteer staff is not a viable option in any effective, modern public library.

**- Negotiate for the positions, not the people.** A salary case must be built on the talents, skills and accomplishments of the library staff. But good compensation is for the good of the library, not for individual staff members. Compensation should not be targeted to the special circumstances of any individual.

*It is a major mistake to neglect the library director's position because a current director does not need a competitive salary. With a competitive compensation package in place, the library board is not only in a position to retain a talented and qualified director, but also in a position to search for one when it becomes necessary.*

**NOTES:**