

16 July, 2024

Trustee Tale

Trustee Tale is a joint project of the Manitowoc Calumet Library System, Nicolet Federated Library System, Outagamie Waupaca Library System, Winnefox Library System and Wisconsin Valley Library System.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions for future articles, contact your system director.

Library Board Appointments

Do you recognize this statement from the library annual report? “The library’s board membership complies with statutory requirements regarding appointment, length of term, number of members and composition.” Each year, by checking the boxes and approving the report, library boards indicate compliance with the statutory requirements found in s. 43.54 (municipal and joint libraries), s. 43.57 (4) & (5) (consolidated and county library services), and s. 43.60(3) (library extension and interchange).

Nevertheless, improper board composition is more common than you would think. Frequent errors in board composition include:

- Having the wrong number of trustees
- Too many non-residents serving on the board
- Trustees serving beyond the expiration of their term without re-appointment
- Failing to have a school representative or failing to have that person properly appointed



A library might operate out of compliance with the statutes for years with no one noticing and no consequences. But when public controversy or legal trouble shines a spotlight on the library, it may suddenly become a serious problem for a board that is not legally constituted.

For libraries established by a single village, town, or tribal government, board members should be appointed by the village president, town chairperson, or tribal chairperson. The municipal governing body then approves the appointment. There should be a minimum of five (5) trustees, and two (2) additional members may be appointed by the governing body for a total of seven (7) members. No more than two (2) members may be non-residents of the municipality.

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All members are voting members and serve a three-year (3) term. Note, these are statutory requirements, and the library board's bylaws cannot change term limits or require the governing body to make specific appointments.

One of the members appointed to the library board by the municipal authority must be the school district administrator or their designee. If the superintendent chooses not to serve on the board, they can designate another representative of the school district, such as another administrator, teacher, school librarian, school board member, etc. The appointee does not have to be an employee of the school or district. The school representative is a voting member and should be appointed for a normal three-year (3) term. It is not an additional board seat, and this person will count toward the non-resident limit if they live outside the municipality.

It is a common practice and widely recommended to have a member of the municipal governing body serve on the library board. A municipal representative is appointed in the same fashion, is a voting member, and serves a three-year (3) term. This appointment should not increase the size of the board, and no more than one (1) municipal governing body member may serve at one time. The municipality may require this appointment, but it is not required by state statute, and cannot be required by the library board's bylaws.

A county chairperson, with the approval of the county board, may appoint additional members to a municipal library board if the library is located in whole or in part within the county. The number of additional appointees is determined by a funding ratio described in the statute. County appointments are in addition to municipal appointments. These county appointees do not count toward the maximum of two (2) non-residents among the municipal appointees, but must be county residents. No more than one (1) county supervisor may serve at one time.

The rules for city libraries, joint libraries, and county libraries are similar in intent to those for smaller municipal libraries but differ in the particulars. If you have questions about your library's board appointments or composition, please contact your library system director for assistance.