

# TRUSTEE TALK

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## Ethical Considerations

### For Library Trustees

The June/July issue of *American Libraries*, the American Library Association's monthly journal, includes an article on the Pueblo (Colorado) City-County Library board. The board fired the library director in April, and now the entire board has resigned under pressure from city and county officials. What brought about the resignations?

The director's attorney claimed he was fired because he questioned the library's business arrangement with the board president who had received over \$188,000 in the last six years for fundraising services.

Another trustee who owned an office supply firm was accused of trying to get part of the furniture contract for the new library. In another incident, the District Attorney said that the board President could have been prosecuted for receiving most of the money paid to a friend by the library for marketing services.

Certainly, no Oklahoma public library board is going to end up being reported in *American Libraries*, but it is important to clarify the ethical standards that govern your work as trustees. Does your board have a statement of ethics? If so, do all of the trustees under-

stand and follow those ethical statements? If not, what standards govern your behavior on the board? Do your fellow trustees share those standards?

"Ethics, A Top Priority for Trustees," a recent article in the *Oklahoma Librarian* written by former Oklahoma City trustee Sharon Saulmon, raised such questions as:

"Is terminating a middle-aged library director age discrimination? Is granting a printing contract to a board member's brother-in-law ethical? Should the board accept funds from a source with whom the board does not agree philosophically? Should board members have library keys or credit cards? Is redirecting fine funds to a board member's pet project ethical? Should library trustees get free personal copies on the library photocopier? Do trustees deserve extras, since after all 'we're volunteers'?"

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# Ethical Considerations

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Some of these questions are black and white. They are clearly a conflict of interest or ethically wrong. Some of them are just what they should be, ethical questions that trustees should think about in the framework of their library.” (*Oklahoma Librarian*, July/August, 2002; p. 41)

Fortunately, there are guidelines that library boards can use to clarify these ethical questions. To begin with, the *Oklahoma Statutes* state that:

“Except as otherwise provided by this section, no municipal officer or employee, or any business in which the officer, employee, or spouse of the officer or employee has a proprietary interest, shall engage in:

1. Selling, buying, or leasing property, real or personal, to or from the municipality;
2. Contracting with the municipality; or
3. Buying or bartering for or otherwise engaging in any manner in the acquisition of any bonds, warrants, or other evidence of indebtedness of the municipality.

Any transaction entered into in violation of the provisions of this section is void. Any member of a governing body who approves any transaction in violation of the provisions of this section shall be held personally liable for the amount of the transaction.” (O.S. 11 §8-113)

Although the *Statutes* define illegal conflicts of interest, they do not cover all ethical questions that may be faced by library boards. Another resource is the *Ethics Statement for Public Library Trustees* that was adopted by the American Library Trustee Association, a division of the American Library Association.

It states that:

“Trustees, in the capacity of trust upon them, shall observe ethical standards with absolute truth, integrity and honor.

Trustees must avoid situations in which personal interests might be served or financial benefits gained at the expense of library users, colleagues, or the situation.

It is incumbent upon any trustee to disqualify himself/herself immediately whenever the appearance of a conflict of interest exists.

Trustees must distinguish clearly in their actions and statements between their personal philosophies and attitudes and those of the institution, acknowledging the formal position of the board even if they personally disagree.

A trustee must respect the confidential nature of library business while being aware of and in compliance with applicable laws governing freedom of information.

Trustees must be prepared to support to the fullest the efforts of librarians in resisting censorship of library materials by groups or individuals.

Trustees who accept library board responsibilities are expected to perform all of the functions of library trustees.”

(Adopted by the Board of Directors of the American Library Trustee Association and the Board of Directors of the Public Library Association in 1985. Amended by the Board of Directors of the American Library Trustee Association in 1988. Amendment approved by the Board of Directors of the Public Library Association in 1989.)

Finally, the *Montana Public Library Trustee Handbook* published by the Montana State

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Library encourages library boards to adopt, and periodically review, a code of ethics to guide its actions. The *Handbook* suggests these statements as a starting point for boards to develop their own codes of ethics:

“As a public servant and advocate for the public library, I will:

- Work to ensure that the public has equal access to information.
- Work to meet the information needs of the whole community.
- Resist efforts to censor library materials.
- Keep all library policies free of racism, sexism and other bigotry.

As a public servant and representative of the community, I will:

- Attempt to interpret the needs of the community to the library and interpret the action of the library to the community.
- Represent the whole community to the library and not a particular area or group.
- Protect the public’s right to open meetings.
- Refer complaints about the library to the proper level in the chain of command.

As a member of the library board, I will:

- Listen carefully to other board members.
- Respect the opinions of other trustees.
- Support the decisions of the board.
- Recognize that all authority is vested in the board when it meets in legal session and not with individual board members.

- Be well-informed of developments that are relevant to issues that may come before the board.
- Call to the attention of the board any issues that may have an effect on the library.
- Vote to hire the best possible person to manage the library.
- Not interfere with the duties of the director or undermine the director’s authority.
- Ensure that the library is well maintained, financially secure, growing and always operating in the best interests of the community.
- Declare any personal conflicts of interest and avoid voting on issues that appear to be conflicts of interest.
- Not use any part of the library for my personal advantage or the personal advantage of my friends or relatives.
- Not discuss confidential board proceedings outside of the board meeting.
- Not promise before a meeting how I will vote on any issue to be decided on during the meeting.
- Work to learn more about the job of a trustee and how to do it better.”

(From the *Montana Public Library Trustee Handbook*, Chapter 6 “Law and Ethics,” published by the Montana State Library)

Ethical decisions for library boards can be big or small, can affect many people or only one or two, and can be clearly illegal or only raise the appearance of unfairness. Hopefully, this article will encourage you to either review, and if necessary revise, your library board’s code of ethics or begin a discussion with your fellow trustees on how to ensure that your board consistently acts in an ethical manner as it conducts your library’s business.

# Inquiring Minds Want to Know

Babies and toddlers lay the groundwork for future learning by the number of connections established in their brains by age three. How can your library help parents and caregivers stimulate those connections in their children? What books are the best to buy? How many children's programs should be offered?

Books and magazines are no longer enough for your library's customers. Access to the Internet attracts new people to the library and seems to take an ever increasing part of your budget. What kind of Internet connection is appropriate? How often should the computers be replaced? Are there any guidelines that can help give you some direction?

You want children and teens to feel welcome in your library. What special furniture and shelving do you need and how do you arrange your children's or teen area? What services should be offered to them? What kinds of materials do they want?

Good public library service is essential to your community. Does your library give good service to the community? How do you know?

These and other questions will be addressed in this fall's workshops for library trustees. The focus of the workshop will be on two documents – *Models of Public Library Service for Oklahoma* developed by the Oklahoma Public Library Directors Council and *Oklahoma Youth Service Guidelines* developed by the Youth Services Advisory Council. Both documents were distributed to and discussed by public library administrators and staff, and have now been adopted by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries' board. Both documents present voluntary guidelines, and contain a wealth of useful information for all of Oklahoma's public libraries.

You received a brochure with this issue of *Trustee Talk* that gives you the details about the fall workshops, *Models and Guides*. To make it as convenient as possible for you to attend, ODL will offer seven workshops:

## Workshop Locations

In the northeast at:

**Will Rogers Library** in Claremore on Tuesday, October 7<sup>th</sup>.

In the central part of the state at:

**Chickasaw Regional Library System** in Ardmore on Monday, September 8<sup>th</sup>,

**Perry Carnegie Library** on Monday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, and

**Mustang Public Library** on Monday, October 6<sup>th</sup>.

In the northwest at:

**Buffalo Public Library** on Monday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>.

In the southwest at:

**Hobart Public Library** on Tuesday, September 30<sup>th</sup>.

In the southeast at:

**First United Bank** in Holdenville on Tuesday, Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>.

Each workshop will be from 6 to 8:30 p.m. and dinner will be served. We hope that you'll be able to attend. We guarantee that your "inquiring mind" will learn something new about libraries!

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## The Best of Worst Times ODL's Budget for FY2004

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." The start to Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* keeps coming to my mind when thinking about ODL's budget for next year. After enduring cuts totaling 7.85% during fiscal year 2003, the State Legislature has added another cut of 2.9% for fiscal year 2004.

## The Best of Worst Times (Continued from page 4)

At first glance, it's easy to see the "worst of times". ODL has had to cut state aid payments and public library construction grants this year in order to keep within the reduced budget allocations from the State. Within ODL, vacant positions go unfilled; book and material budgets are smaller; traveling to conferences and meetings is restricted; and we are generally trying to save as much money as we can in everything we do.

But it could be a lot worse. Oklahoma is in the middle of an economic downturn, and damage to several of Oklahoma's largest employers from May's tornados also contributes to the financial problems. Many state agency budgets are being cut much more than 2.9% for next year, and some state agencies are furloughing or laying off staff. ODL has not had to eliminate any of the services we offer to Oklahoma libraries and, most importantly, libraries are still providing quality service to their communities.

In these hard economic times, the services that public libraries give to their communities are even more important. Libraries provide information about unemployment benefits and other government programs, and have resources to help people look for jobs or live more economically. Internet access is available to people who can't afford a home computer or telecommunication costs. Books can be used to study or improve job skills. And magazines, books, programs and videos offer free entertainment for people on tight budgets.

Thanks to your advocacy efforts, state legislators and local government officials understand the importance of libraries and are trying hard to support local library services. This summer is a good time for us to find ways to individually thank our legislators and local officials for their support of our libraries.

## Have You Heard About ALTA?

ALTA is the American Library Trustee Association, which is a division of the American Library Association. ALTA presents programs for trustees at ALA conferences, publishes an official newsletter, gives awards, and offers library trustees opportunities to network with other trustees throughout the United States. It's a wonderful way to keep up-to-date with issues affecting public libraries and improve your skills as a library trustee.

ALTA programs at this year's ALA Conference included programs on salary advocacy, increasing board effectiveness and library services for senior citizens. ALTA is also working to recruit and train a national network of advocates ready to speak out on behalf of libraries and librarians.

You can find out more about ALTA by visiting their website, [www.ala.org/alta](http://www.ala.org/alta). After you've looked at ALTA's site, you might want to explore other areas of ALA's website ([www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)) for more information about public libraries, current events, library conferences and helpful publications.

### **ALTA's** Mission Statement:

The Association for Library Trustees and Advocates promotes and ensures outstanding library service through educational programs that develop excellence in trusteeship and actions that advocate access to information for all.

# Worth a Visit

“Worth a Visit” is a new feature that begins with this issue. Oklahoma is blessed with many beautiful public libraries, both new buildings and well maintained and restored older buildings. Two or three of these libraries will be featured in each issue along with their addresses and hours of operation. Certainly, those of you planning to construct a new building or renovate your library can get many new ideas by visiting these libraries. Also, if you’re looking for new ideas to make your library more attractive or run more efficiently, these libraries can offer fresh ideas. And, if you just like to visit good libraries, you should enjoy visiting all of these sites. Finally, if your library is pictured, hopefully you’ll enjoy a nice feeling of pride. Our first three libraries featured are the Anadarko Community Library (serving a population of 6,645), the [Ardmore Public Library](#) (serving 23,711) and the [Mustang Public Library](#) (serving 13,156).



The [Mustang Public Library](#), located at 1201 Mustang Road, is open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday through Thursday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday, and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday. Part of the community center, the library enjoys a spacious floor plan, attractive furnishings and plenty of natural light.



# The Salary Game

**Negotiate! Go Out on a Limb!  
Play to Win! It's the Classic  
Game of Strategy for Librarians  
Ages 21 to 101**

This fall the Oklahoma Department of Libraries is offering a series of workshops for library administrators on how to negotiate with their supervisors for better salaries, benefits, etc. We would certainly welcome any trustees who can attend. Here are the details.

Learn to play The Salary Game with the help of professional negotiator Paula Singer. Paula will teach you the strategies of negotiating: how to plan your moves, who is the right person to ask, when to negotiate, and what your needs are and why. The Salary Game is not a game of chance. Learn the skills you need to Play to Win!

Registration begins at 9:30. The Game begins at 10:00 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m.

- Monday, August 18<sup>th</sup> at the Ardmore Public Library (320 E Street N.W.)
- Tuesday, August 19<sup>th</sup> at the Elk City Carnegie Hall (215 W. Broadway)
- Wednesday, August 20<sup>th</sup> at the Fairview City Library (115 S. 6<sup>th</sup>). For this workshop, registration will begin at 8:30 a.m., and the workshop will run from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, August 27<sup>th</sup> at the Stillwater Public Library (1107 S. Duck)
- Thursday, August 28<sup>th</sup> at the Will Rogers Library in Claremore (1515 N. Florence Avenue).



The [Ardmore Public Library](#) is located at 320 E Street N.W. and is open from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Monday through Thursday and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Check out the jungle theme in the children's area, the beautiful furnishings and the well designed staff work areas.

The Anadarko Community Library is located at 215 West Broadway and is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday. Occupying what was once a car repair shop, the library features a unique children's story pit, numerous computers for the public and a spacious and open floor plan.

## Libraries Are Funny?

Maybe because most librarians really like people, we're usually quick to see the humor in ourselves and in the work we do. The Michigan Electronic Library has assembled a list of humorous library websites. So when you feel yourself becoming too serious, take a look at [www.mel.org/libraries/LIBS-humor.html](http://www.mel.org/libraries/LIBS-humor.html) or enjoy these examples:

- A patron asked the librarian why Tales of Robin Hood had been withdrawn from the collection. The librarian replied "Too much Saxon violence." (From the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.)
- As regards anything besides these, my son, take a warning: To the making of many books there is no end, and much devotion to them is wearisome to the flesh. (From Ecclesiastes 12:12 New World Translation 1961.)
- A Great Moment in the History of Technical Services: In 427 A.D. the Library at Alexandria decided to contract out its annual weeding project; Vandal hordes were the lowest bidder. (By Wendy Lewis, the University of California at Irvine.)
- A chicken walks into the library. It goes up to the circulation desk and says: "book, bok, bok, boook". The librarian hands the chicken a book. It tucks it under its wing and runs out. A while later, the chicken runs back in, throws the first book into the return bin and goes back to the librarian saying: "book, bok, bok, bok, boook". Again the librarian gives it a book, and the chicken runs out. The librarian shakes her head. Within a few minutes, the chicken is back, returns the book and starts all over again: "boook, book, bok bok boook". The librarian gives it yet a third book, but this time as the chicken is running

out the door, she follows it. The chicken runs down the street, through the park and down to the riverbank. There, sitting on a lily pad is a big, green frog. The chicken holds up the book and shows it to the frog, saying: "Book, bok, bok, boook". The frog blinks, and croaks: "read-it, read-it, read-it". (From the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.)

- A little old lady regularly presented small bags of almonds to her favorite librarian to thank her for helping pick out interesting books for her to read. Worried about the cost, the librarian gently let the lady know that, although the nuts were nice, they weren't really necessary. "Oh, it's no bother," she answered. "With my false teeth, they're no good to me once I've sucked the chocolate off." (From *American Libraries*, August, 1998, p. 148.)

**Trustee Talk** is a publication of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries designed specifically for public library trustees. Because Oklahoma's public libraries serve diverse communities, Oklahoma's library boards can be either a governing or an advisory board and may serve a large system, a metropolitan area, or a rural community. Therefore, some information in Trustee Talk may not be useful to you and your library. However, we hope that everyone will find something useful in each issue.

If you have questions on anything you have read, please contact your regional consultant at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. If you would like to suggest topics for future issues, please contact Ginny Dietrich, editor, at ODL, 800-522-8116 or [gdietch@oltn.odl.state.ok.us](mailto:gdietch@oltn.odl.state.ok.us).

**Check out ODL's website at:**  
[www.odl.state.ok.us](http://www.odl.state.ok.us)