

## Understanding the Role of the Library Board of Trustees

*By Aaron Enneking on assignment for the Indiana Library Federation*

In Indiana alone, there are more than 1,700 public library trustees representing **238** libraries. As you know, each library has its own board of trustees, usually comprised of a president, vice president, treasurer and members at large. But what you may not know is the variety of duties performed by trustees.

Tasked with setting policies, hiring the director, planning for the future of the library, monitoring and evaluating the overall effectiveness of the library, and advocating for the library in the community as well as for the community itself, the board of trustees is ultimately responsible for the successes and failures of the library. And while the board rarely involves itself in day-to-day issues -- rather delegating most tasks to the library director, at which point a task may be further delegated to staff -- the board of trustees must nonetheless set the framework for the success of the library and its policies. Often this involves developing a long-range plan with the library director responsible for the development of a short-range (1-year) plan created to carry out the long-term vision of the board.

It is the role of the board of trustees to approve the annual budget (typically provided by the library director), as well as to monitor the performance of the library and library director, and evaluate progress the library has made toward achieving set goals. One such way the trustees can monitor the director's performance without following him or her around all day is by creating a clear, specific job description for the director and by building a strong working relationship between the director and board of trustees. By doing so, the board is able to effectively evaluate the director's performance. Likewise, the trustees must also build a strong working relationship with each other and evaluate themselves individually and as a team.

As far as who does what, it is important to note that while the board of trustees has the final authority over the library, the director is in charge of virtually all day-to-day matters of routine management. Because of this, it is of utmost importance that the trustees, library director and library staff work together as a team toward a common goal.

Currently, hot-button advocacy issues facing most library trustees include budget reductions and how libraries can survive them while protecting jobs and continuing to provide services to communities that often need these services more than ever before, but each community has its own special needs and the board of trustees for each library must advocate for these needs as well.