

## INTRODUCTION

by Sara Laughlin  
Guest Editor  
May 1998



End or beginning? The approach of a new millenium offers an opportunity for those associated with public libraries to take stock. It is not just a new decade or a new century, but the end/beginning of a new thousand year era. For public libraries, the turning of the calendar surely represents epochal challenges and opportunities. In this special issue of *Indiana Libraries*, we focus on public library trustees and offer current theory—governance, management, and economic—along with a substantial dose of best practice. We hope that trustees and the larger library community in Indiana and elsewhere will take some time to read and reflect on the thinking enclosed here.

In the first article "Strategic Positioning Plans to Achieve Your Library's Vision," Ellen Miller asserts that the duties of trustees fall into two categories: fiduciary and legal. She outlines seven areas in which trustees exercise fiduciary responsibility: planning, operations, staffing, communications, evaluation, resources, and vision. We have adopted these seven areas for organizing the articles in this collection.

Vision. According to Miller, vision is the "linchpin of a successful library." She describes a process for examining customers and stakeholders to define the library's target audience and setting goals, strategies, and action plans to position the library. She outlines important roles for trustees to play in achieving the library's vision and includes examples of vision statements and positioning strategies.

Planning. John and Miriam Carver are well-known experts in the field of policy governance, a system which they developed in Indiana. In this article, they return to the roots of policy governance and describe two kinds of policies that trustees should create—*ends* policies which define the customers and services that the library will provide and *means* policies which proscribe (i.e., set off limits) those actions which the director may not take to reach the ends. Within those limits, they propose that the director should have complete authority for action. Their theories have been tested and proven over twenty years in hundreds of not-for-profit organizations.

Sidney Marks reviews neoclassical economic theory and its potentially threatening impact on the public library's role as a "popular materials center." He finds cause for hope in the writings of Francis Fukuyama, who

proposes that only 80 percent of economic behavior can be accounted for by considering profit motives alone. He suggests that some community organizations—libraries among them—serve as "intermediate social structures" that help create the "social trust" that accounts for the remaining 20 percent of social capital. His is a cautionary tale, but with a glimmer of hope that libraries can adapt to the "survival roles" required by neoclassical economics while continuing to make cultural contributions.

Operations. No one would argue that the operational decisions facing library trustees will be simpler in the next millenium. In this issue, we look at only two that face public libraries—building security and collection development. Bruce Canal uses his experience as a state policeman and security consultant to advise library trustees on best practices for securing public spaces.

Millard Johnson describes Inspire, the new state-wide full-text suite of databases that promises new ways of accessing information for Indiana information seekers. Inspire is exciting, not just because it brings information to the desktops of Hoosiers at home, at school, and at work, but because it is a model of cooperative endeavor which could blossom in the next millenium. He speculates on future directions that Inspire might take.

Staffing. Many books have been written and conference programs given on productive board-director relationships, but there are as many failures as successes in public libraries in Indiana (or, I venture, any other state) Steve Saucerman, President of the Board of the Mooresville Public Library, and Lynn Jurewicz, Director, write together about working together as a team. Their article offers a model and shows an unprecedented level of communication and understanding that will be the envy of many in the library community.

Communications. Whether it's among the trustees or between the library and the community, communication will be critical to public libraries in the next millenium. Our authors look at two aspects. Jeanne Farah and Sally Otte describe a process for building the board team and share the "Expectations for Board Conduct" they developed at Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library.

Jim Fleck tells the story of building community support for the Peabody Library in Columbia City—a process that can help trustees in other communities find

and nurture the support their libraries need.

**Evaluation.** Perhaps the hardest thing that trustees have to do is to evaluate their director, as it requires dispassion, careful control, and consistent practice. Yet evaluation is one of the keys to effective leadership, as it offers a regular opportunity for board and director to discuss priorities, results, and plans. With it a good director gets better and better; without it no director can long feel secure. Dan Cain shares strategies for director evaluation based on the library's long-range plan and the job description.

**Resources.** Tim Seiler takes us back to Benjamin Franklin and the beginnings of public libraries and reminds us that "public libraries were born of private philanthropic initiative, not public governmental action." I venture that was true for most Indiana libraries, as well. Seiler says that foundation funding can "get things started, or rejuvenate languishing projects, and they can inspire confidence in other givers," but they cannot provide "sustained support over time." Corporate partnerships offer another funding opportunity, especially if libraries can align themselves with what corporations want to accomplish. The overwhelming majority of of giving—\$130 billion a year—is by individuals. Seiler offers suggestions for identifying potential donors, building relationships with them, and asking them for gifts.

Virginia Rose tells the story of a library building project at Monroe County Public Library, where she was President of the Board. It was a 12-year process that resulted in "The Jewel of the Community"—a building which is widely admired and heavily used.

**Legal.** At last, we come to the second responsibility of library trustees—assuring compliance with a growing welter of laws and regulations. David Ferguson shares the basics of the Open Door Law and how its considerations must be extended to committee meetings as well as meetings of the entire board. He also discusses public comment at meetings of the board.

Perhaps the hottest area of public library discourse is the First Amendment, Internet access, and protection of children. Fred Cate takes us carefully through the legal basics of all three issues and shows how each constrains the other. This is one area that will surely affect your library in the next millenium.

This issue of *Indiana Libraries* offers food for thought for Indiana library trustees that will last well into the twenty-first century.