

Frequently Asked Questions Trustee Advocates Southwest Iowa Library Service Area

What is a Trustee Advocate?

A trustee advocate is a representative from a library's board of trustees to act as the "point person" for learning about, and keeping updated, on library advocacy issues. The designated advocate will share information and ideas with fellow trustees on the board, and with advocates from other boards.

Why do we need a Trustee Advocate?

One of a library trustee's major roles is to advocate for the library. In good budget times or bad, advocacy is an essential part of "Telling the Library Story." It tells (and shows!) the community that the library is there for them, serving their needs. The library staff does their part in Telling the Library Story, but when it comes to issues such as funding it is important for the trustees to speak for library, as the library staff is often seen as having a vested interest. The trustee is not an employee of the library, but a representative of the community to the library, and of the library to the community.

What are the responsibilities of the trustee advocate?

The advocate plays an important role; he or she:

- participates in the network of Trustee Advocates via e-maillists, chat sessions, ICN sessions and occasional face-to-face meetings and/or workshops
- shares information from above with fellow trustees
- assists in the development of an advocacy plan for the library (along with SWILSA Administrator and/or trustees, if desired)

How much time should a Trustee Advocate plan to spend on advocacy responsibilities?

There is a wide range of time an Advocate can choose to spend--the bare minimum is probably an hour or two per month during most months. We plan to hold occasional meetings or sessions for the Trustee Advocate network, but those will probably not occur more than 2-3 times per year. In most cases the Advocates will not need to travel far--perhaps not even outside his or her own town, or even home!

Of course, we hope that Advocates will develop such a passion for library advocacy that they will want to devote more time, spending time researching and learning more about library issues, attending the Iowa Library Association or even national conferences, and talking with other trustees.

How do I become a Trustee Advocate?

All library trustees are advocates, of course, but to be the designated Trustee Advocate for your library, talk with your fellow trustees and let them know you're interested. Then, the library director can forward your name and contact information to the Library Service Area.