

Board Members as Volunteers

Initial question from trustee: The idea of having a Board of Trustees member participate as a library volunteer has come up, and I'm getting varying information as to whether or not this is okay. I did review the trustees manual, and I didn't see anything indicating that it was not okay. I would appreciate your input, along with any other suggestions you might have regarding this.

Response from Tracy Cook – October 25, 2011

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. I have been working a lot of overtime lately, so I took some time off and managed to stay away from my email.

It is pretty common (especially in small libraries) for board members to also be library volunteers. This is usually okay as long as the board member remembers to be a volunteer when in the library and a board member at meetings. Problems occur when a board member who is a volunteer starts trying to run the library or doesn't listen to the director or staff when receiving instructions. It can also be a problem at board meetings if the board member starts making decisions as a volunteer rather than as a board member who is responsible for overseeing the library. Having said that I've seen very successful examples of board members as volunteers. These people generally are able to separate the two duties. They usually volunteer for a specific set of duties (storytime or cataloging), and they do those duties the way the library director wants them to be done. The board members refer any questions from library patrons to the director and when board meetings happen these people can usually put on their board member hat and essentially not think about their volunteer duties. Often board members who volunteer learn a lot about the library and have a better understanding of the challenges library staff face.

I hope this helps. -Thanks, Tracy