OWLS Director Report
September 18, 2025 OWLS Board of Trustees Meeting

IMLS Authorization and Funding
The statewide "Speak Up for Libraries" postcard campaign wrapped up in August. Wisconsin library champions sent over 11,000 postcards to federal legislators. We are cautiously optimistic about IMLS funding and authorization following favorable subcommittee votes in both the Senate and the House, which recommend that IMLS is appropriated $291.8M for federal fiscal year 2026. The Grants to States program is allotted $180,400,000, an increase of $400K from 2025 enacted. We await a final Congressional vote later this month.

Trustee Training
Trustee Training Week, a series of five webinars offered at noon each day, was held August 18-22. Tracy and I presented the Tuesday webinar, "Trustee 101: An Introduction to Being a Wisconsin Public Library Trustee." All five webinar recordings are available to watch here: https://www.wistrusteetraining.com/archive

In-person trustee workshops scheduled for August and September were cancelled due to low registration (two or less). Two workshops are still scheduled for October:

- Trustee 101, Wednesday, October 8th, 5:30-7:30 pm at Waupaca Area Public Library
- Trustee 201, Monday, October 20th, 5:30-7:30 pm at Fond du Lac Public Library

Register here: https://newilibraries.org/

OWLS Directors Meeting
We held our annual in-person meeting of OWLS member library directors at Mosquito Hill Nature Center in New London on August 21st. Representatives from 13 member libraries attended. Guest speaker Kari Preuss of Elroy Public Library presented "Why is the Librarian Paid Less than Everyone Else?" The agenda included OWLS Staff reports from Bradley, Chad, and Kristin, a library roundtable discussion, review of *Administrative Essentials Chapter 3: Who Runs the Library*, discussion of the proposed library subs program, and feedback on the 2026 system plan priorities. Member libraries reported excellent participation in the summer library program this year. In addition to this annual meeting, OWLS member directors meet online every other month, opposite AAC meetings.

Outagamie County Funding Update
I attended my annual 15-minute budget meeting with Thomas Nelson's team on August 27th. They were excited to hear about the libraries' busy summer. I will attend the County Finance Committee meeting on October 2nd.

OWLS-NFLS Merger Exploration

One of the objectives in our strategic plan is to, "Intentionally and inclusively explore the feasibility of a merger between NFLS and OWLS." OWLS and NFLS have contracted with WiLS to complete the following work in the summer and fall of 2025:

1. Complete Phase I of the System Merger Guide
    a. Build, document, and assess relationships and partnerships between the two systems
    b. Perform feasibility activities
        i. System compatibility assessment
        ii. Identification of merger benefits
        iii. Research to understand system size impacts on system success
        iv. Reach out to external experts, especially the Library Services Team at DPI for guidance and support
        v. Identify grant possibilities to help support a merger effort
2. Prepare for Phase II as outlined in the System Merger Guide
    a. Develop project principles for potential future stakeholder review
    b. Determine research questions (i.e., the questions that must be answered for members, boards, and county officials to vote in support of a merger)
    c. Build a framework for next steps including a committee to perform merger exploration work, documentation mechanisms, and timeline

Tracy and I completed initial questionnaires in August and met with the WiLS team on September 8th. They are reviewing our data and conducting research, and we will meet again on October 23rd. I expect to have a report for the OWLS Board at the November or January meeting. Following that report, the system boards will advise on whether to proceed with the next phase.

OWLSnet Administrative Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting

AAC held their annual, in-person meeting on September 12th at Appleton Public Library. Representatives from 20 OWLSnet member libraries attended. Some of them were making their first visit to the new APL. The agenda included feedback on OWLSnet training, discussion of collection development and AI, and whether to revise or rescind the OWLSnet patron update form, linking patron records policy, and internet policy. In addition to this annual meeting, AAC meets online every other month. AAC agendas and minutes are now behind a login on the new OWLS web site. Would the OWLS Board like to receive AAC agendas and/or minutes via email or in your board packets?

ILS Exploration

In the month of September, OWLS and member library staff attended vendor demos for the Bibliocommons discovery layer and Polaris ILS suite, and we will attend upcoming demos for Aspen discovery layer and SirsiDynix ILS suite. These product demos are part of our yearlong ILS exploration process. OWLSnet Manager, Amanda Lee, has prepared a summary of the project to date, following this report.

Visits to Member Library Boards

Bradley and Kristin have completed eleven board visits to: Weyauwega, Kaukauna, Fremont, Shiocton, Marion, Manawa, Clintonville, Little Chute, Scandinavia, Seymour, and Waupaca. Hortonville and Appleton visits are scheduled for this week. OWLS Trustees are invited to attend these meetings. Please contact Bradley if you would like to join us on any of these visits:

- Wednesday, September 30th, 4:15 p.m. at Iola Village Library
- Monday, October 20th, 4:00 p.m. at Kimberly Public Library
- Dates TBD: Black Creek Village Library and New London Public Library

Upcoming OWLS Board and Committee Meetings

- Thursday, October 16, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. – Personnel Committee
- Thursday, November 20, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. – Board Meeting
- Thursday, December 4, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. – Executive Committee