

The Complete Idiot's Guide to being an ASLA Trustee

By Shawn T. Kelly, ASLA, and Gregory A. Miller, ASLA

Chapter 1. So ... You've been elected ... Congratulations ...

Your Job

The trustee occupies the most direct and important link between the membership and the national activities of the Society. Trustee responsibilities are twofold: (1) to express the perceptions and needs of the local membership as the official delegate of a chapter; and (2) to represent the profession at large in formulating the policies of the Society. A trustee must be capable of understanding and reflecting both spheres of interest. The Society's bylaws set out the general duties of all officers and trustees. The following description provides more specific guidelines for the performance of a trustee and the qualifications sought by the Society for this most important office.

Responsibility of the Trustee to the Chapter

- Participate in meetings of the chapter executive committee, providing effective understanding of the Society's actions, policies, and sources of help for members.
- Inform fellow trustees, officers, and staff of chapter opinions and comments on local and Society-wide issues.
- Persuade fellow trustees, officers, and staff to take actions seen as appropriate to the local chapter.
- Serve on standing committees and/or task forces when appointed.

Responsibility of the Trustee to the Board

- Inform the local chapter of board opinions and comments regarding the best interests of the overall Society.
- Persuade the chapter to take actions seen as appropriate by the board regarding the best overall interests of the Society.

The Key Challenges

- Balance one's own chapter opinions and concerns with those of other chapters in a manner that reflects both the collective will of the chapters and the best interests of the overall Society.
- Achieve all of the required responsibilities through effective service on the Board of Trustees and the chapter executive committee.
- Advocate policy decisions that will improve the effectiveness of the Society in meeting its goals.

Qualifications

- A balanced view of local and Society-wide information, issues, ideas, and concerns.
- An ability to express those matters in an articulate, persuasive manner.
- An equivalent ability to hear and absorb the views of other trustees, officers, and staff.
- An understanding of the Society's planning and program evaluation process.
- Skills in personal time management and organization in order to deal with an extensive flow of information between the Board of Trustees, officers, staff, and the chapters.
- Adequate time to deal seriously with Board of Trustee and chapter demands.

Authority

- Receive a thorough orientation on entry to the position and additional skill development through periodic seminars during the term of office.
- Vote on all matters of the Board of Trustees.
- Vote on all matters of the chapter executive committee.
- Request items to be placed on both the Board of Trustees and chapter executive committee meeting agendas.
- Sponsor or endorse changes to the Society's bylaws.
- Have full access to appropriate staff as delegated by the executive vice president.
- Request and receive information well in advance of the time when Board of Trustees discussions will occur and decisions will be required.

Board of Trustees Roles and Responsibilities

- Set goals and objectives and priorities.
- Establish policy and direction.
- Ensure effective use of resources.
- Provide financial oversight.
- Monitor program and budget in context of strategic plan.

Board of Trustees Authority

- Establish and amend policies and ethical standards.
- Adopt the annual budget and program plan.
- Set dues and levy special assessments.
- Establish and amend bylaws.
- Establish and disband chapters.
- Create and abolish standing councils and committees.
- Elect vice presidents.

You'll Receive

- Leader's E-Express (from national).
- Terse comments (from the last trustee).
- Too much to read in too little time. (Vente. No water.)

You'll Produce

- Monthly reports to your chapter reflecting on what's moving and shaking at national.
- The status of events that will affect your chapter.
- A focus on how to make your chapter one of those moving and shaking things noted above.
- Special reports:
 - From the midyear meeting in DC.
 - From lobby day at the midyear meeting.
 - From national annual meeting (somewhere new each year).
 - From possible committee involvement.
 - From somewhere in the Caribbean, at the water's edge
- Expense reports that you will send, with chocolate, to Mary Hanson for reimbursement. Remember that national has a \$200 exclusion on your reimbursables, so try to get your chapter to cover this expense. Also, most events require you to share a room with another trustee or elected member of your excom to save expenses. Rooms are typically funded at 50% for midyear and annual national meetings. Funding for trustee rooms stops the last day of trustee meetings. If you choose to stay for

the convention then you will need chapter support. You may want to move to a less expensive hotel to save funds.

Election of the Chapter Trustee

A trustee is elected by each chapter of the Society for a term of three years. Election schedules are arranged so that approximately one-third of the trustees are elected in each year. A trustee may serve no more than two consecutive full terms.

Chapter 2. Midyear Meeting in Our Nation's Capital

Typically held in May, this event has seen weather that has included snow, rain, and some lovely warm weather. Pack accordingly. The dress for trustee meetings is office dress, with an extra set of good clothes for pictures, meetings with Congress, formal mixers, and other events.

National organizes your accommodations and always selects an excellent hotel. Be prepared for an excellent room with multiple amenities. Sometimes there is even a pool to swim in, though it is typically pretty open. The hot tub is popular, though.

Fly into Ronald Reagan National Airport because:

- It is actually located in a zip code near your final destination.
- It is connected to the subway (sort of) that will take you to town for cheap. Memorize the subway map, paying special attention to the color coding of the lines. It will save you later. Unless you are color blind. Then you have no hope of ever finding your hotel or DC. Au revoir.

You will eat well. Breakfast, lunch, and sometimes hors d'ourves are provided for your benefit. Meals are also a good time to find out what you did the night before, before it is too late to tell anyone significant. Or to copyright the text and find the negatives.

Take your sketch book and visit this incredible city. There are amazing details around every corner. Sometimes at the corner. Sometimes they will approach you and ask what you are doing with that book. No matter. This is our nation's capital. See this place.

There are many hours between the last meeting of the day and breakfast the next morning. From Ford's Theater to the Vietnam Memorial, from the Smithsonian to the Capital Brewery, it is an amazing place. The White House, the Capitol, and Lincoln Memorial are musts to visit and capture in your sketches.

A great deal of business is done at this meeting. You will be able to represent your chapter on matters that you were able to share with your ExCom prior to boarding the plane. On some issues you will be required to represent your chapter in a manner you believe they would support, as there is no time to share some issues with them. Relax. They elected you as their representative. You can make a reasonable judgment on their behalf.

At this and the annual meeting you will need to speak up on the open microphone during sessions. When you approach the microphone you should always begin with a loud statement of your name and the chapter you represent. This takes care of the parliamentarian, the minutes, and clears up any doubt who you are and why you said it.

You will be assigned to a trustee group. These groups are named after famous departed landscape architects. The group will be the unit which deals with smaller, intense discussions from time to time during the meeting.

The dress for the last day seems to be airline casual. I don't think I got that memo, but it looks like a different meeting than the past several days. Some are planning a quick escape after the last session. Some are hoping to fool the authorities.

A good idea is to place your bags in the bell captain's care and check out of your room before the last day's meeting begins. This will let you nap soundly while everyone else is worried that the session is continuing past check out time and they are late for a plane.

Chapter 3. National Annual Meeting

The trustees typically meet for two days prior to the annual meeting of the association. During these meetings you will be party to the goings on of the organization at the highest level (just below the Executive Committee which is just below the Executive Vice President and President of the ASLA meetings).

Dress is the same as the midyear meeting. You may have some shared sessions or lunches with your chapter president's who are having similar meetings concurrent with yours.

You will typically select your hotel room for this event. You may want to consider taking the hotel that is designated as host hotel. Most of the trustee meetings are held at this hotel and the convenience of staying close to breakfast and meeting locations is huge. You can repair to your room between sessions to freshen up or to watch the news or to don your superhero costume, or to call the office or

At the conclusion of this meeting and the beginning of the national conference, you may feel like this was your meeting and what are all these other people doing here? It is okay. They may be the people who elected you to serve as their trustee. Prepare a short description of how you spent the last two days so that you can try to tell all who ask about your meetings.

During the trustees meeting there will be a satellite registration desk set up where you can pick up your registration materials for the national conference (if you are going). This is exceptional, and reminds you what an amazing group of people we have working for us at the national level.

Also during the annual meeting trustee sessions will be scattered the goodbye speeches of the departing trustees. Start now working on what you want to say. The general comments include a pantheon of superlatives and some teary-eyed goodbyes. Start when you get elected and your speech will be a memorable one. Wait ... the whole board changes every six years max cycle Maybe the Executive Committee will remember the exceptional sayonara. I bet Parliamentarian Don Leslie, responsible for Roberts Rules of Order during the meetings, will remember. He has probably heard them all by now. And then some.

Chapter 4. Committee Assignments

Be careful here. Remember someone once suggesting, with great passion, that you should become involved and make a difference? Perhaps that voice was your own. Before you quietly slink into the shadows of the anonymous crowd here is a chance to shine. You will be even more amazed at how this whole operation works. The volunteers do amazing things.

You may be asked to sign up for a national committee. Regard this opportunity with awe, and consider your availability. These committees do a great deal of work for the organization—all volunteers with one

staff person and one ExCom officer as contacts. [Click here](#) to review committee service opportunities. The president-elect's call for committee volunteers is open in June-July of each year. As a trustee, you will receive the call via email and it will be published in the June-July issues of LAND Online.

Sign up for as many as you are interested in and decide that you will be integral to the operation of our organization. Be warned that these committees are important and do a great deal of work for the operation of our organization. They are often manned by those who have been trustees before and are looking for involvement that continues their connection with our organization. They always do important stuff and you need to return your seat to the full and upright position prior to beginning any of them.

Chapter 5. The Community of Trustees

There are lots of jokes about the elite trustees. Perhaps you used to tell them when you were chapter president (maybe when you were having a working lunch at the presidents meetings while they were going to some catered affair ...). It is a community. The trustees are a group of volunteers (at least my tax bracket did not change significantly due to my involvement) who work hard at doing good work. The meetings are intense and you may find yourself with a solid voting stand on an issue only to hear some eloquent and passionate speakers make you take a second look at the whole thing again. These are excellent people. Most have achieved levels of leadership in firms, government, or education. Some have aged well and some are very young. All are invested in the process of our organization and have determined to be a part of the process that we call ASLA. They also party like college sophomores. Drink from whatever shoes they may have on and only leave false id's. There, I've said it. What amazes me is that some of the most heady business gets done well after the meetings have stopped in the conference halls. Instead, the discussions of topics only hinted at during the day are hammered out over beer and booze in some local water hole. How can these people speak so eloquently this late and with that much of a bar tab? (Bring money for social time, too.)

This is an amazing thing to observe. Be careful what you say here ... many a committee has been staffed after sessions.

You will begin by knowing none or few of the people in the room at your first meeting. You may remember some from past offices held, or hazily remember someone from a national meeting. When you are done with your term of three years (or max of two three-year terms) you will probably know most, if not all of these exceptional people. A quick way to learn is to print out the picture listing under **Board of Trustees on the ASLA website** and go over them every night over and over and over again. Or not.

There are no secret handshakes (there aren't, are there?). There are no special insignia. These are just committed landscape architects who want to serve. There really aren't any secret handshakes, are there? At the annual meeting you will receive a ribbon that sticks to your plastic badge holder that says "Trustee." As a young LA, I used to wonder what a trustee was, did, and was trusted with. Now I believe I know that these individuals are entrusted with the careful consideration of business that runs our organization. They are representing the best interests of chapter members from across the country. They are the thread that holds the fabric of our ... never mind. Are you sure there is no handshake?