



Libraries Need Friends:

A Toolkit to Create Friends Groups or to
Revitalize the One You Have

Sally Gardner Reed, Executive Director, United for Libraries

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Toll Free: (800) 545-2433, ext. 2161
Direct Dial: (312) 280-2161
Web site: www.ala.org/united
E-mail: united@ala.org

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries need Friends – it's just that simple. In fact, across America many public libraries were established through the efforts of community members who understood the value of libraries to their communities and also understood that libraries needed community support to survive. Did you know that a criterion for securing a Carnegie grant was a demonstrated commitment by members of the community to raise additional funds and support for a new library? This concept hasn't changed over the course of the past 150 years – what has changed, however, is that academic and school libraries are also beginning to understand the

How

MAKING THE DECISION TO START A FRIENDS GROUP

Though Friends groups play a wide variety of roles for their libraries, it is important in starting a Friends group that the library administration, the academic administration (if school or college), the trustees (if public), and potential Friends are in agreement about what the expectations for a Friends groups are. The library may need a Friends group, initially, for a very specific purpose such as passing a bond issue, embarking on a capital campaign, or starting a library foundation. If this very specific need is driving the first time creation of a Friends group for your library, your plans for targeting members will be in alignment with this goal. In other words, you'll be looking for key members who have marketing experience, fund raising experience, or foundation experience.

Many Friends groups of long standing initially had their roots in a very special need such as those mentioned above. Most, however, grew out of library supporters' desire to do something "tangible" for the library that means so much to them. Or, they come about because a library is slipping in its services – demands continue to increase while budgets decline. Visionary library administrators who understand both the tangible and intangible benefits of a library support group initiate the establishment of some groups themselves.

Because Friends groups tend to prioritize their roles for serving the library and focus most on their highest priorities, it's a good idea when working to establish a new Friends group that the library and the new Friends work together to decide what is needed most. What will be the Friends' mission? Think about the following possibilities:

- Fundraising
- Library promotion and marketing
- Advocacy
- Immediate need such as a new building or a major budget increase
- Creation of a library foundation
- Creation of a strong library volunteer force

Of course most Friends groups do all of these things to varying degrees based on the current need. However, without thinking about all these goals, the recruitment of members to the new Friends group won't be as effective because you won't be able to be as clear about what you are trying to accomplish as you are when you've thought about these roles and given them some priority.

GETTING STARTED

Creating a Friends group will take some time, energy and expertise. It's a good idea to do what is necessary to do it right the first time rather than rush into it, make costly mistakes, and spend months or years to come trying to convince those who may have been turned off by a haphazard approach to join the Friends group once you do have your house in order.

Here are some of the issues that will have to be addressed as you start up a new Friends group:

- Development of a core (executive) group of Friends members who will actually be doing most of the administrative work and strategic planning.

of that so their level of commitment stays high.

The Formal Operating Agreement Between the Friends and the Library

What? Do we really need to get it in writing, after all the Friends and the Library both have the same ultimate goal in mind – improving and enhancing the library’s service? While it’s true that you undoubtedly are focused on the same goal, how that goal is best accomplished can be and often is the road to ruin for many Friends and Libraries. The Friends, for example, may see early childhood learning as the most important public library service – and the library itself may even agree! However, that case may have been well made to the city administration and well funded whereas the library’s program budget is non-existent and the library is desperate to create programs for teenagers. Where will the Friends money go? To picture books or teen programs? Who decides?

The academic library may be in serious need of a marketing campaign to raise its profile and cache on campus but the Friends have been most successful and most interested in raising money for new computers. Should the Friends continue down their traditional path that has been so successful or channel their resources into a new, professional marketing campaign? Again, who decides?

Nothing has doomed the relationship between Friends and the Library more than misunderstandings about how the money and the time of the Friends group will be spent. Of course the best working arrangement is to ensure that both Friends and Library continue to keep one another in the loop. A Friends executive board member should always attend Trustee or Library governance meetings and library director or his/her designee should attend Friends executive board meetings. In addition, Friends should always be invited to participate in a library’s planning process. Nothing will get the Friends and the Library on the same page better than working together to design a strategic plan. When that happens, the Friends’ goals will be in alignment with those of the library greatly reducing any conflicts about how resources will be employed.

To ensure that Friends and the Library have a solid foundation for all future funding and advocacy initiatives, it’s a good idea to work out how and who will make decisions regarding the Friends efforts. The ideal agreement will involve a spirit of mutual input into the final decision. In the end, the library administration has, by policy and position, the ultimate authority to accept or reject any gift to the library.

The goal in an operating agreement should be that all Friends’ gifts (of money, time, or talent) meet exactly the highest needs of the library. An agreement that requires negotiation for all gifts offered and requested is best. In other words, the agreement might state that the Friends will work with library administration once each year in determining goals for fundraising, advocacy, and volunteer services. A model that is highly typical and works well is for the Library to submit a wish list to the Friends in priority order with strong justification for the request. The Friends may of course determine what areas of the wish list they want to support. If the once a year joint planning session has taken place, there should be no surprises in either the Library’s request or the Friends’ priorities for funding. Considerations for the operating agreement should include:

- How will the Friends be incorporated into the library’s planning process?
- Are Friends authorized to spend their funds on organizations, agencies, programs or projects that are not directly linked to the library and, if so, under what conditions? This will be included in th

The executive board should be designed to function as a strategic leadership team.

- Terms of office.
 - How officers are selected.
 - Appointment and duties of standing committees.
 - Provisions for special or ad hoc committees.
- Meetings:
 - Time, place, and frequency of meetings.
 - Method for calling regular and special meetings.
 - Attendance requirements.
 - Quorum requirements.
 - Order of business.
- Procedures for amending bylaws.
- Parliamentary authority.
- Dissolution clause (detailing what will happen to the group's assets if it should dissolve).
- Date of adoption.

GOING LIVE: BRINGING M

Membership Recruitment

You've done all your homework. You have an active and committed executive board. You have established your mission and have worked with the library staff and trustees to develop an operating agreement. You are now a 501(c)(3) organization. You know how you want to structure the group and you have determined what you will charge for membership. The time has come to bring on as many community members as possible. The membership campaign begins. This would be a perfect job for a membership task force!

The most effective way to get members on board is to promote, promote, promote. Develop a brochure that is distributed at the front desk of the library and all its branches. Include in the brochure a list of the membership categories along with what they'll receive in return for their contribution, a location to send their check, a phone number where the prospective member can get more information, and a list of committees that the Friends will be establishing. Include a space where new members can opt to become more engaged in the group by joining one of the named committees and be sure you are ready to follow up with that new member. If your group is typical, most new members will simply show their support by writing a check and wish for nothing more than to receive a monthly newsletter. Others, however, will see this as an opportunity for community volunteer work and will be delighted to join a committee. Those that do become actively engaged will evolve into a larger core group of Friends from whom you will get most of your volunteer support and future officers. It's important to keep these more active new members engaged and nurtured.

Be sure you let your prospective members know what they will get for their membership. They will get a better library for one thing and you should press that point home. Most people will welcome the opportunity to provide additional support to the library via the Friends and will want nothing more. Others will want that opportunity to be involved via task force assignment and ultimately a chance to be an officer. Many will look forward to a newsletter once a month to let them know what's new. Still others will be attracted to knowing ahead of time about library book sales and have an opportunity to attend a "sneak preview night." All these are the "deliverables" that your core group has determined prior to the membership launch.

Work with the library staff to encourage them to give the brochure out to every patron at the check-out desk. If you are supporting an academic Friends group, work with your development office to see if there is a list of parents or alumni you can use to solicit membership from those who have a stake in the library even if they aren't students. Be sure, as well, to solicit both membership and involvement among the faculty.

Think of places outside the library where you are likely to attract new members with your brochure. How about doctors' offices, grocery stores, the student center and cafeteria, local bookstores? The brochure that you develop may be very simple and inexpensive at first. As time goes by and your membership grows, you may decide to make your promotional materials more polished with a Friends logo and a professionally designed layout. For now, however, the important thing is to get the opportunity for joining to as many outlets as possible.

Another good way to promote membership is to write a press release about the importance of library support through Friends. Make the press release compelling enough that it is likely to be published. For example, start out with a proclamation that the "new" Friends of Johnson Library" are embarking on a community or campus-wide membership campaign. Let the readers know why. What prompted you to start a Friends group in the first place? Was it a need for a better budget, a new building, more books and programs? Whatever caused your core group to establish a Friends group should be reiterated along with a strong pitch for the reason why it is so important. Be sure to include contact information, the range of dues members are asked to pay, and the opportunities members will have to be engaged in the organization – in other words the task forces you will be trying to fill.

Many Friends groups increase their membership ranks by hosting programs that will attract members of their community. An author program, for example, will no doubt be popular. Another perfect opportunity to pull together a task force. Think about asking a local author do a program on how to get published. If you provide the author with an opportunity to sell books and you promise lots of promotion about the program, you are likely to get a local writer to do it for free. Use this program (and all public programs your group sponsors) as an opportunity to promote membership in the Friends. Be sure you have a lot of brochures and encourage folks to join on the spot.

Be sure that everyone involved in the core group assists in extending your reach to members by promoting your Friends group at every opportunity. The members of your core group are likely involved in other civic or social organizations as are the Trustees. Be sure they are asked to take a quantity of membership brochures to meetings of these groups. You can help motivate this core group by setting a challenge. Ask that each member of the executive board bring in a minimum of 10 new members. After a defined length of time, honor that executive member who has brought in the most new members by taking her or him to lunch – the rest of you have to pay!

Let your imaginations go in deciding how you will encourage members in your new Friends group. With some ingenuity and a little work, you'll be surprised how many people in your community or on campus are willing to support the library through the Friends.

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you thought it was the over 70 crowd. Not so but as mentioned earlier, these active volunteers are busy. They are looking for opportunities to be involved in projects that have a beginning and an end. They want to be involved in task forces not committees!

Understanding how the environment for your membership has changed over the years will go a long way in helping you design programs and a campaign to bring in members who are likely to be entirely different than members you've had in the past. In addition, if your group was formed and active because the library had a well defined and pressing need that has since been met, you will want to discuss ways in which to promote the *new* and equally compelling needs of the library. For example, a new building requires a bigger budget, more staff, more computers, and more materials. Friends groups can reposition their publicity to promote membership to address these needs, either through fund-raising or advocacy or both.

One danger in looking back at "the good old days" may be a temptation by some to try to hang on to what worked then. Sometimes groups begin to fail because the leadership wants to hold on to old programs and ideas that used to work rather than evaluating *why* they worked then and *why* they may be less effective now. The environment is constantly changing, it's important for your Friends group to key into the realities of a new environment and analyze those changes to direct your thinking about new programs, initiatives, and promotion techniques.

Looking Forward

Now that you've evaluated how your environment has changed and come up with reasonable explanations about why membership and activity in your group is dropping, it's time to look ahead at how you bring in new members, new membership revenue, and new volunteers who will help support and promote the Friends.

It's a good idea to consider just who is likely to become a Friend as well as who should be targeted for membership. You should also determine what you need new members for. If it's to increase your revenues through dues, or if you are looking for a larger database of supporters to whom you can write for special programs or initiatives, you might want to focus your appeal on the importance of their contributions to the well being of the library. If your primary goal is to raise funds and increase your database of library supporters, you will

Designing a Membership Campaign

Much of what you do to develop a new group is the same for revitalizing your group and increasing your membership. (See *Going Live, Dues and Deliverables*, and *Membership Recruitment* above). You will want to develop a marketing and membership promotion campaign that includes development of a (new) brochure and lots of local publicity about your renewed efforts.

In order to get more active participation in your group, be sure that your membership brochure includes categories that a new member can check to become more involved. For example, in addition to the usual information in a membership brochure such as category and dues, name and address; be sure to list committee options. A few sentences such as ***Our Friends Group Needs You! Please let us know if you would be interested in helping in the following areas:***

- Programs
-

CONCLUSION

In any case, whether establishing a new group or revitalizing an existing group, the most important ingredient for membership is promotion and follow through. Your goal should be to ensure that every single person in your library community knows that there is an effort underway to increase support to the library through Friends membership. Every member in your community should be invited to join and once they do, they should hear back from your organization right away thanking them for their participation.

Libraries need Friends – your efforts are important. Good Luck!

Appendix A

Recommended Additional Reading

Books:

101+ Great Ideas for Libraries and Friends by Sally Gardner Reed, Beth Nawalinski, and Alex Peterson
Even More Great Ideas for Libraries and Friends by Sally Gardner Reed and Beth Nawalinski

Toolkits (available to United for Libraries members in the Friends & Foundations Zone):

‘ Tapping Into the Biggest and Most Active Volunteers in Town – The Baby Boomers!
School Media Center Friends Groups: A Prescription for Success
Friends and Libraries Working Effectively Together
Incorporating and Tax Exempting Procedures for Friends of Libraries
Expanded Model Friends’ Cooperative Network

Fact Sheets for Friends and Foundations (available on the United for Libraries website):

#1 Starting a Friends Group
#4 Starting an Academic Friends Group
#6 Friends of a School Library or Media Center
#7 Revitalizing Your Friends
#10 Role of the Friends Board
#11 Role of the Trustees
#14 Board Development
#18 Getting and Keeping Members

Appendix B

Sample Memorandum of Understanding Between Friends and Libraries

The following will constitute an operating agreement between the Friends of the Anytown Public Library (Friends) and the Anytown Public Library (Library). It will stand until and unless it is modified by mutual agreement of the Friends executive board and the Anytown Public Library administration. The Friends mission is to raise money and public awareness in the community to support the services and programs of the Library. As a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, however, it is a legally distinct entity and is not a part of the Library.

The Library agrees to include the Friends in the long-term planning process to ensure that