

PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATIONS RESOURCES FOR FLORIDA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

10. FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY GROUPS AND LIBRARY FOUNDATIONS

“Friends of the San Francisco Public Library is dedicated to bringing libraries to life. Friends works in a variety of ways to support SFPL and encourage literacy. As a foundation, Friends provides grants to the Library that respond to a wide range of community needs, and supports and produces programming that enriches the lives of people all across San Francisco.”

Friends of the San Francisco Public Library

As libraries consider whether or not to establish library foundations, they should first look closely at the groups which have assisted them in raising external support over the years. Many libraries, and almost all public libraries in Florida, have Friends of the Library groups. Assessing the role of these groups, their fundraising capacity and history, and their ability to meet the private funding needs of the libraries they support is critical. This section of the resource guide will look at the role of the Friends of the Library group, its capacity to take on a more significant role, and its potential relationship with a library foundation.

Historically when public library supporters have wanted to join in a formal, local effort to help libraries thrive, they have become members of Friends groups. Predating library foundations, Friends groups have been doing advocacy and fundraising for many years. Until fairly recently they were often the sole source of private funding for their local libraries or branches.

Friends of the Library groups often have two primary purposes - friend raising and fundraising. Friend raising, creating an awareness of the library and its needs, usually is the impetus for the formation of a Friends of the Library group. Over the years, in rural towns, suburban areas and large urban centers, small groups of people came together to help the library in some way – volunteering their time and experience to help the library become better known, better supported, and better funded. Often these groups were offshoots of the original creators of their towns' public libraries. The power of a few people getting together with a common purpose is impressive; many Friends of the Library groups have had a long and distinguished history of active support of their libraries.

When friends and volunteers turn into Friends, an official organization working for and on behalf of the library, the official Friends needs to be in tune with the library's needs, plans and ambitions for the future. Friends of the Library groups should not operate in a vacuum. They need to be involved and included in the library's plans, made aware of operational and capital needs, and become familiar with the issues that the library is facing in the political arena. The library's goals and the Friends' goals need to be aligned. Friend raising – making friends who will help the library – is just as important as fundraising. In fact, by making more friends for the library, fundraising becomes easier. But if the library and the Friends are at cross-purposes the results can be unfortunate.

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FRIENDS — READY TO FUND RAISE, OR NOT?

Assessing whether your library's Friends group is ready to fundraise or not can be a complex task.

Friends groups come in all sizes, with varied histories, experience with, and understandings of fundraising. Some groups have been extremely successful in raising funds for the library from the general community. Others have focused on one type of fundraising, such as used book sales, and have a significant history of raising money through these annual events. Still other groups have good intentions but no real expertise or experience. And, in a few rare cases, there are Friends groups who have their own agendas, driven by personalities instead of the library's own mission and plans. These want simply to do whatever they choose with or without the library's blessing.

If your library has a Friends group and you choose to use this group as your vehicle for fundraising from the private sector, you should first do a general assessment of that group's capacity to fundraise. The following sample questionnaire may be helpful in determining fundraising capacity for your library's Friends group. You can use all or some of the questions as appropriate.

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Friends Assessment Sheet

1. *Does the Friends group have Internal Revenue Service nonprofit status (501c3), has it applied for this status, or it is willing to apply for this status?*

_____ Yes

_____ No (Reasons)

2. *Does the Friends group have experience in raising funds for the library?*

_____ Yes *If Yes, How much does the group raise on an annual basis?
For what purposes?*

_____ No *If No, What has the group done on behalf of the library?*

3. *What is the history of the Friends group? How long has it been in existence? How many members does it have? What has been its primary purpose?*

4. *Who is in the board of directors of the group? How are they selected? Are there board members who have the capacity to raise funds for the library?*

5. *What is the nature of the relationship between the Friends and the library?*

- *Library Director?*
- *Library Advisory Board?*
- *Is there open communication and consultation or is work and planning done in a vacuum?*

6. *What is the financial condition of the Friends? Is there an annual budget and set fundraising targets? Does the Friends have financial assets and, if so, how are they managed and accounted for?*

7. *Does the Friends group have paid or volunteer staff?*

- *Office space?*
- *Communication tools such as a newsletter?*

8. *Who makes decisions about fundraising goals of the Friends?*

9. *Is the Friends group committed to the library and its goals and objectives? Will it work closely in partnership with the library to raise funds to fulfill these goals and objectives?*

It is important to remember that simply checking off a yes or no on an assessment sheet is only one step in determining whether the Friends group is the most appropriate partner for library fundraising. You must also consider the talents or limitations of group members and where your library is in terms of fundraising. If it has experience raising funds from the private sector, how was this done and who helped? Even a willing and eager Friends group with limited or no private sector fundraising experience might need to proceed cautiously until the group has acquired greater expertise.

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As you complete your assessment, think beyond the current situation and look at what is possible with an inexperienced but extremely willing Friends group. If you have the time and energy to work with this group, they can be developed and their fundraising capacity enhanced and strengthened. If the Friends are your only alternative at this time, doing the work to build their capacity is part of the fundraising task ahead.

FRIENDS AS COMMUNITY ASSETS

Friends of the library are often passionate believers in what the library is trying to accomplish and have worked long and hard as advocates, formally and informally, on the library's behalf. Friend making is often the best first step in fundraising. The close ties that many individual members of the Friends of the Library groups have in the community are often their most valuable assets.

So, what can Friends do? They can serve as ambassadors to the community, communicating the library's message to their personal contacts and to organizations with which they are involved. They can be advocates and effectively reach out to elected and appointed officials at budget time and throughout the year. They can volunteer in a variety of capacities, always in keeping with the library's policy on volunteerism. They can raise funds – from book sales to large-scale capital campaigns.

But Friends cannot and should not operate in a vacuum. That is, they must work closely with the library and its Director or designated staff to determine:

- What is the best role for the Friends?
- How can they serve as the most effective assets for the library?
- How can the roles and relationships be made clear and specific?
- Who establishes fundraising needs and goals?

Resources for Friends groups may be found through the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends, and Foundations (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/altaff/>). ALTAFF is a national network of enthusiastic library supporters who believe in the importance of libraries as the social and intellectual centers of communities and campuses. Their website includes a number of "Friends and Foundations Fact Sheets" which provide helpful information on issues including starting a Friends group, getting and keeping members, and revitalizing your Friends.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN A FOUNDATION AND THE FRIENDS

The benefits of a partnership between the library and the Friends may seem obvious. There are, however, situations in which the partnership becomes tenuous. When the library and Friends do not agree on any of a number of issues – from fundraising goals to programs to expenditure of funds – a volatile and unpleasant situation may develop. This may become even more complicated if a third party is introduced into the mix – the Library Foundation.

As some public libraries move into more aggressive fundraising, they find that they need a more professional and expert organization in order to be successful. They may outgrow the Friends' capacity and/or willingness to raise significant funding, or they may feel the need to enhance the Friends' work by hiring a director of development. Whatever the reasons, the library needs to tread sensitively as it prepares to follow a new fundraising route. Unless there is an open and agreed-upon strategy in which all the partners have distinct and clear roles and responsibilities, rivalries, jealousies, fiefdoms, bitter feelings – the stuff of soap operas – can cause more damage than good.

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If the decision is made to establish a library foundation to do the major fundraising on behalf of the library, be sure to let the Friends know first and explain the reasons for doing this. How this decision will impact the Friends and their responsibilities will certainly need to be made clear. Consider the following:

- What are the Library's goals and objectives and what are its fundraising needs now and over the next five to 10 years?
- How are funds raised currently and is it done effectively?
- What has been the role of the Friends in fundraising and has it been successful?
- What is the relationship between the library and the Friends and is it satisfactory?
- Do the Friends have the capacity and the willingness to do the necessary fundraising now and in the future?
- Is there the opportunity to establish an effective library foundation?
- What will the roles and the relationships be between and among the three organizations: library, Foundation, and Friends?
- How can each of the partners enhance the other partners' missions and goals?

FRIENDS OR FOUNDATION

There is no single answer to the question: "Which fundraising model works best for my library." Local factors should drive and determine which model to use. Libraries have used a variety of models to pursue private funding. The most common include:

- Friends of the Library groups (with and without paid staff)
- Director of Development position (internal to library, usually reporting to Library Director)
- Library Foundation (separate from library and with or without paid staff)
- Library Foundation (separate from library and with library staff serving as de facto foundation staff)
- Creating or merging the Friends and the Foundation as one organization. Several libraries have done this successfully, most notably the San Francisco Public Library which merged their Friends and Foundation in 1999. (www.friendsfpl.org)

In order to determine what the best fit is for your library, look at your resources, look at your needs, look at the potential and ask the questions:

- What meets the needs of the library and the community?
- What resources can be applied to accomplish our goals and objectives? What is already in place and is it appropriate?
- What needs to be accomplished and how will this be done?