TRUSTEE Tips

Should our library form a "Friends of the Library" group?

What are "Friends of the Library"?

A **Friends of the Library** group is a community-based support group whose aim is to further the goals of the library in the community. Successful, effective friends organizations work closely with the board and staff but are independent of them. They believe in the library's mission and are primarily concerned with advancing the library, its plans and priorities.

Friends of the Library groups have existed for years; however, as budget restrictions continue to strain resources, library boards are seeking new ideas to alleviate the pressure. Consequently, interest in forming such groups is increasing.

What kinds of activities are friends involved in?

Friends of the Library groups are active in raising funds, volunteering in the library or advocating for it. These activities often result in an enhancement of the library's image in the community and the development of additional or expanded library services.

It must be stressed that a friends group should never be intended as a substitute for strong municipal funding support, board advocacy or staff activity. However, the friends' contribution may well allow the library to do more with less.
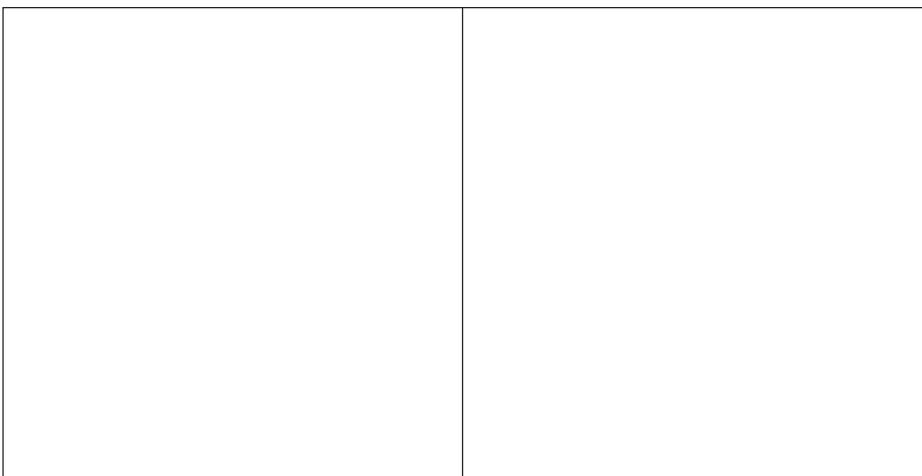
Fundraising:

Fundraising is perhaps the most common activity for a friends group. The fundraising activities of **friends** groups range from simple book sales to complicated events or even corporate donation campaigns. The scope of these activities is limited only by the imagination and energy of the friends and the willingness of the board and staff to provide the required support and liaison.

It is important to match the fundraising initiative to the particular community. For example, the **Friends of the Ilderton Library** (a branch of the Middlesex County Library) produced a simple recipe pamphlet, printed on a single sheet of paper. All the recipes were for dessert squares and appear in the baker's own handwriting. The pamphlets sell for one dollar and are an innovative enterprise for a small

community. The **Friends of the Ottawa Public Library** have set up a Trust Fund which accepts donations on behalf of the Friends of the Library. The Fund is a capital sum which is invested. Each year, the resources of the library are enhanced through the interest generated by the Trust Fund. The Library continues to benefit from donations and donors are assured of a lasting gift to the Library.

Friends groups sometimes develop out of a specific financial need. In March, 1993, such a group developed at the **Riverside Branch of the Windsor Public Library**. That library building was in poor shape and badly in need of replacement. Initially, a local citizen's group, it broadened into a Friends of the Library group.

The group has been holding bazaars, bake sales, discard sales in several locations and bingos, and is strong in its commitment to help the library and

the community. A major thrust of their fundraising campaign was targeted to local service clubs. Arrangements were made for the library to present its case to the Lion's Club resulting in a $50,000 donation. Donations from the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs totalled $16,000. At present, they are almost halfway to their $250,000 goal.

What about municipal funding?

Concern is often expressed that funds generated by friends groups put municipal and provincial funding in jeopardy. Ontarians support libraries with their tax dollars at both the provincial and municipal levels. Since a municipality is expected to fund the operation of the library, as it would fund other municipal services, such as public works, additional dollars raised by friends should not affect municipal funding levels. Boards, however, will need to be prepared to argue effectively against any attempts to decrease municipal support because friends have raised additional funds.

Careful planning during the development stages will help to alleviate these concerns. Most friends groups raise funds for special projects and events, outside the realm of the library's regular operating budget.

Volunteer work:

Volunteer efforts of friends groups may allow the library to offer services that might otherwise be impossible. Such activities include shut-in service, recording survey information, assisting with special interest groups and special events or activities. If friends are involved in actual work within the library, it is imperative that the tasks undertaken by them be carefully considered. The volunteer's purpose in the library is to provide assistance, not to do the work of regular staff. For example, the **Nepean Public Library** has a very active, separate volunteer group for a variety of tasks ranging from reading for Alzheimer's patients to maintaining the gardens and trees.

Some libraries with union agreements may prohibit the use of volunteers entirely. Even if it is possible for volunteers to assist in the library, staff may feel uncomfortable with the

idea. These concerns should be discussed fully. Are there activities in the library which could be done by volunteers? What are the implications for staff? If there is staff opposition to the idea, can it be resolved? It is important to specify clearly how staff and volunteer roles would differ and to explore staff concerns. Then, necessary policy guidelines can be drafted. *It is essential to discuss and clarify volunteer tasks and to ensure that these tasks would not normally be done by paid staff.*

Advocacy:

Friends groups can have a powerful impact on the library's image in the community. An active friends of the library group draws attention to the library as a desirable, useful and essential element in a community's quality of life. A separate citizens' group representing library interests and the principles for which it stands can be influential at budget time, and may protect or even increase the level of funds from council.

The Nepean friends group is building a kiosk to sell promotional items. Each year, a "volunteer marketplace" provides an opportunity for volunteer groups to sell and promote themselves in the community. The kiosk extends the "marketplace" concept throughout the year. Since the kiosk can be set up in the library or moved anywhere in the community, this simple activity has a strong advocacy impact by increasing community awareness of the library and linking it to the Volunteer Network in Nepean.

While the library's position in the community may be greatly enhanced by advocacy efforts on its behalf, it must be stressed that advocacy is a major board responsibility.

Why develop another group when there is a volunteer board?

Governing boards are increasingly concerned with leadership. They devote more time to developing the mission of the organization and to planning how it will be situated in the community of the future. Governing boards represent an "ownership", as board-development expert John Carver terms it, and must

be aware of and respond to the needs of this ownership.

The increased emphasis on governing means that boards may have less time for fundraising, long-considered to be a major responsibility of not-for-profit boards. The assistance of a sep-arate group for this purpose is often necessary.

Regardless of the purpose of the friends group, the relationship between the board, the library administration and the friends must be set out explicitly. Carefully crafted policies should govern the establishment of the group and its liaison with the board and the library administration. It should be very clear that the friends group is not involved either with the governance or management of the library.

Each library staff, board and friends group must determine how liaison will occur. All should work for the good of the library. To help insure this, board and staff should be represented on the friends' governing structure. Policies to guide friends in their activities will help to focus efforts on common goals and priorities and define appropriate responsibilities.

Getting started...

• Assess your resources

Careful planning of the friends process includes evaluating the time, as well as the financial, personnel and external resources required to develop and maintain the group.

Time

A friends group should never be a drain on board or staff time; however, some time will be demanded of both board and staff in developing and working with friends groups. The board, with staff input, will need to provide the initial planning and impetus to get things started. Ongoing liaison between the library staff, the board and the group is essential to keep the enterprise on track.

Supervision of friends activities is also an important consideration. Provision must be made for overseeing activities, for ensuring that activities are the most beneficial to the library and for outlining specific responsibilities for all concerned. Collingwood Public

Library has developed a volunteer program guide that includes job descriptions, expectations and responsibilities for staff and volunteers and procedures for specific tasks. It provides both an orientation and on going direction for volunteer activities.

Budget

There are some dollar costs in establishing and maintaining a friends group. Although the group may be set up to be self-sustaining, there are items which should be included in an initial budget such as publicity and promotion costs involved in recruiting members for the group.

Nepean Friends find a solution

In the early days of the friends group at Nepean Public Library, volunteers handled book sales and limited outreach services. Although the organization had a charter and had obtained a charitable number, it was never very successful. The group needed to analyze why. "What became crystal clear," says Sylvia Teasdale, a staff member who works with the 'friends', "was that we couldn't differentiate a friend from a volunteer and that had to be very clear." The volunteers wanted to do library work, but the library needed fund-raising assistance as well.

The answer came in dividing the group into a two-tiered operation. There is a "friends executive" whose only purpose is to raise funds. "Friends executive" members are recruited especially for this fundraising task so that there is no confusion over what they are supposed to be doing. The other tier is made up of volunteers, involved in a variety of activities, but not in raising funds.

Potential friends

Although a friends of the library group may spring up independently in the community, it is more likely that the board will initiate its development. Patrons may be potential friends. A question on an upcoming survey may enquire about patron interest. As you formulate an action plan to develop your group, target specific organizations to encourage membership in friends. You may find that community groups, such as seniors' organizations or service clubs, will yield possible friends. Ex board members may be particularly helpful in recruiting. Involve these new friends in the early planning stages if possible.

▶ *Friends of the Thunder Bay Public Library aim for a new branch*

The Thunder Bay Friends of the Library are part of a coalition of groups whose aim is to establish a new branch in the northwest corner of the city. Along with two citizens' groups, the Housing Cooperative and the local Rate Payers' Association, as well as the Library Board and Administration, the Coalition has embarked on "Bucks for Books"- an extended campaign to raise $125,000 to open a branch in the County Fair Mall.

Capitalizing on a donation of $10,000 in advertising from the Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal, the coalition put their advertising dollars into inserts with the weekly television schedule. The donation itself and the way the advertising dollars were used has helped to increase awareness of the project in the community. Thunder Bay's former Mayor is the honourary campaign chairman.

The coalition is gearing up for a door-to-door canvassing campaign. This undertaking requires enormous organization and dedication, but the coalition intends to open the new branch in the spring of 1995 - in time to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the amalgamation of Port Arthur and Fort William into Thunder Bay.

• Define what the library can give in return

Volunteers give generously of their time and energy. Acknowledging this contribution is extremely important. It is a good idea to build this acknowledgement into your initial planning. A small budget amount may be required, but the benefits will far outweigh the expense. Most people find giving a pleasure when they know their efforts are appreciated. There are hundreds of little ways to thank volunteers as well.

Simple ways to recognize library friends

- *post a volunteer "honour roll" in a visible spot in the library*
- *say "good morning", "good night" and "thank you"*
- *send newsworthy items on friends activities to the media and post them in the library*

• Give the group a solid base

Once the decision has been made to form a friends group and a core group has been assembled, the organization should be established as an entity separate from the library and the board and governed by its own constitution and by-laws. The next issue of **Trustee Tips** will discuss constitution and by-laws in detail. The friends group may even wish to consider **incorporation**, the formal process by which an organization becomes a "corporation".

If fundraising is to be the group's major focus, then registration as a charity should be considered seriously. Charitable Status allows the organization to give official donation receipts and exempts it from paying income tax. An official donation receipt issued to a donor decreases the amount of taxable income the donor must pay and is, therefore, a distinct advantage.
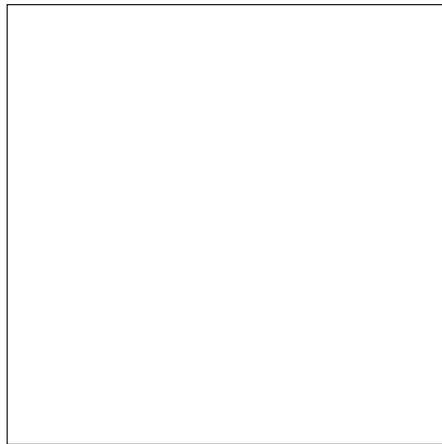
• Weigh the pros and cons for your situation

It is crucial for the board and the staff to spend enough time at the outset determining whether a friends group is really what your library wants. There is a lot to be gained if you lay the groundwork.

Talking to other libraries who have had experience - both good and bad - is very useful. They may be willing to share sample policies and procedures, as well as provide helpful advice.

The potential advantage of doing more with less may be hard to resist, but also consider possible disadvantages. Thinking your way through the process before beginning may take some time, but it will help you in making the right decision for your library. Your attention to detail in the preparation stage will pay off in the long-term.

For further reading...

Law, Margaret. *Friends for Small Libraries*, Canadian Library Association, Ottawa, 1991.

Additional resources

- In June 1992 the **Canadian Library Trustees Association** published "Friends of the Library", number 7 in their *Backgrounder* series. It is available from **the Canadian Library Trustees Association**, 200 Elgin Street, Suite 602, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1L5.

- **American Library Association** (ALA) videos and Friends of the Library Kit are available in the SOLS professional collection.

- OLS-North Professional Collection has ALA videos and **Friends of the Library Sourcebook** as well as a sample constitution and by-laws and other background information. Northern libraries can also book a workshop on the topic.

- Saskatoon Public Library published a directory of friends groups in Canada. It is available for a nominal charge. Contact the Administration Office at 311 23rd Street, East, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7K 0J6.

- Your neighbouring libraries may be willing to share experiences with you. Invest some time and talk to those involved with friends groups at other libraries. Some Ontario libraries with active friends groups are: Atikokan, Collingwood, Flesherton, Fort Frances, Hearst, Huntsville, Manitouwadge, Nepean, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ottawa, Schreiber, Temagami, Thunder Bay and Windsor.

- *The Not-for-Profit Incorporator's Handbook*, written by the Companies Branch, Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations and the Office of the Public Trustee for Ontario, is published by Queen's Printer, Toronto, (Rev. 03/93), ISBN 0-7778-1102-2, is available from the Ontario Government Bookstore.

- For information on Incorporation, call or write:
  Companies Branch, Ministry of Consumer and Corporate Relations
  393 University Avenue, 2nd Floor
  Toronto, Ontario M7A 2H6
  (416) 596-3757

- Information about registration as a charity is available from:
  Charities Division, Revenue Canada, Taxation
  400 Cumberland Street
  Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0L8
  or call toll free 1 - 800 - 267-2384

- *Upcoming Workshops in May* will feature **Margaret Law**, noted Canadian expert on *Friends of the Library* presented by SOLS Training and Development. Law is also the author of the popular manual on forming Friends of the Library Groups published by the Canadian Library Association.

  Workshops will be held as follows:
  London area - **May 6**;
  Escarpment - **May 9**;
  Vaughan - **May 10**,
  Gloucester - **May 13**.
  In northern Ontario, Margaret Law will attend the Trustee Conference in **Sudbury** and present a session on **May 5**.