

TIP SHEET

How to start a Friends group

A Friends group can be a real bonus for your library and community. Although a Friends group exists as a separate entity from the library, Friends support the library in everything they do. Here are the steps involved in launching your Friends group.

1 Form a steering committee

A steering committee is a great start point. Your committee can include the library manager, a board representative and a few concerned citizens who are committed to the library.

Your steering committee will take responsibility for Steps 2-9.

2 Decide on your purpose

Knowing your Friends purpose will affect your planning and decisions. Your group could:

Raise funds: Some groups are formed to help with major capital funding like new buildings or renovations. Others conduct ongoing fund-raisers like book sales or raffles to make purchases for the Library.

Supply volunteers: Friends can serve as extra help for the library. In some libraries, Friends assist with routine tasks, work bees, special events and programs.

Advocate for your library: Some Friends groups help increase library visibility by lobbying public officials on behalf of the library. Activities might include letter or phone campaigns as well as face-to-face meetings.

Raise awareness through public relations:

Friends might speak to groups, host events, prepare promotional materials, or informally promote the library in everything they do.

Your Friends group might have more than one purpose, but every purpose must closely align with the goals of the library.

3 Discuss communications and resources

You can prevent future problems by deciding early on how the Friends and the library will communicate and where Friends resources will come from.

◆ Will the library board assist with start-up costs? Will the Friends raise money to cover its own costs?

◆ Will the library provide a meeting room, administrative or photocopying support?

◆ Will your Friends group have a board liaison who attends your meetings and a Friends liaison who attends board meetings?

Take nothing for granted. Clear communications and expectations between Friends and staff help ensure success.

4 Define your membership criteria and dues

General membership will include interested community members who will work together to help achieve the group's goals. In the planning stage, the steering committee defines the rights, roles, and responsibilities of both general members and the Executive. The Executive is responsible for leading the group and setting policies regarding finance, programs and volunteers. A typical executive includes a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer. The executive can be elected at the first meeting.

Most Friends groups charge a membership fee, even if it's only a dollar a year. The advantage of an annual fee is that it allows the group to keep a current membership list.

6 Set up your Friends' structure

Your steering committee will need to decide if your Friends' group is to be incorporated as a society in Alberta. There are many advantages. Once incorporated, your group becomes a separate legal entity that can apply for government grants and conduct fund-raising activities.

To incorporate as a society, you must choose a society name, and complete an application form and a set of bylaws. You can find details at <http://www.servicealberta.ca/716.cfm> Once incorporated, you can also apply to become a registered charity with Revenue Canada. As a registered charity, you can accept donations for the library and issue income tax receipts to donors.

7 Create a tentative schedule for the first year's activities

It's important that you have ways to involve members as soon as they join the group. Depending on your purpose(s), the steering committee can outline a number of projects or initiatives that the group can get started on right away.

8 Publicize your new friends group

You will want to let your community know about your new Friends group. Use as many channels as you can to spread the word — newspaper announcements, your library newsletter and website, brochures, posters, bookmarks, etc.

9 Plan your first meeting

Your first meeting's agenda can include introductions, a description of the purpose of the Friends, a discussion of plans for your group, and refreshments. This is also the time to elect the Executive.

Personally invite a guest list of handpicked community members. Seek out individuals who are involved with other organizations and service clubs, past and present board members, and council representatives. Be sure to invite library patrons who are strong library advocates.

After the first meeting, your group is officially launched and your steering committee can disband.

10 Celebrate your successes

Now that you are launched, it's time to work towards your goals. Be sure to evaluate your progress, celebrate your successes, and adapt to the evolving needs of your library.

For more information, borrow these resources from the Parkland Professional Development Collection:

Friends for Small Libraries by Margaret Law (Canadian Library Association, 1991)

How to form your friends of the library group by Dorothy Macnaughton (Friends of Canadian Libraries, 2007)

The Essential Friends of Libraries: Fast Facts, Forms, and Tips by Sandy Dolnick (American Library Association, 2005) - includes a CD of templates

Tip Sheets focus on skill building for Parkland Regional Board, member library staff, boards and Friends groups.