
FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Friends of the Library are groups of citizens who join together to support, improve, and promote libraries. They understand the importance of library service to the community and work in a variety of ways to help provide high-quality service and to stimulate the use of the library.

Friends have no vested interest in the library and are in the unique position of being able to make enormous contributions in several areas: fund-raising, services, public relations, advocacy, volunteerism, and community involvement. Their activities change as needs change. Friends usually select a limited number of activities to emphasize.

The roles of trustees, library director, and Friends are related but distinct. Trustees represent citizen control and governance of the library. The library director represents the administration and management of the library. Friends of the Library represent citizen participation and assistance to the library. It is highly important to the success of the total library program that all three clearly understand their respective roles and work together toward common goals.

WORKING WITH FRIENDS

Trustees should assist the Friends organization and support its activities by providing leadership in the following ways:

- Develop a policy on Friends.
- Become a member and attend Friends special events.
- Appoint a liaison with the Friends.
- Ask for input from the Friends.
- Express appreciation to Friends for their support and service.

A good relationship between the library director and the Friends group is essential in fostering a climate for joint accomplishments. Each must have a basic understanding of their goals and objectives, a recognition of the strengths that each brings to a common purpose, and the realization that through cooperation they can achieve ultimate success.

WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?

The purposes of organizing a Friends organization vary depending on group interest and community needs. Friends are usually organized with one or more of the following objectives:

- to increase community awareness and use of the library
- to work for library legislation or appropriations

- to encourage gifts, endowments, and memorials for the library
- to provide direct financial assistance
- to raise money and campaign for a new building, renovation, or expansion
- to sponsor programs designed to add to the cultural life of the community
- to volunteer work in the library on specific projects designated by the director

Friends can be most effective by:

- adopting bylaws, including a clear statement of the Friends' roles
- keeping informed of library plans and policies
- planning their activities with the approval of the library director
- carrying out projects without excessive demands on the library staff

Need Help Organizing or Revitalizing a Friends Group?

The Library Development and Networking Services Division of the Library of Virginia can provide assistance in getting a Friends group organized and in maintaining an active program. Consultative service, books, videotapes, lists of other Friends groups, and a variety of brochures and newsletters are available on request.

Does your library have a Friends group?

Does the board have a policy on the Friends group?

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers constitute an important community resource for many public libraries. When a program is developed, it should be with the understanding that the use of qualified volunteers in a library program is a supplement to, not a substitute for, paid staff.

Volunteers usually come to the library on an individual basis and participate in ongoing work or special projects within the library setting. Their tasks should be of genuine significance and should enhance the services and capabilities of the library. Volunteers can be advocates for the library within the community.

Libraries should not undertake a volunteer program unless the library board and the director are committed to the concept and are willing to devote the necessary time to develop a program that is well managed and will benefit the library.

Successful volunteer programs are:

- planned and approved by the staff and board
- based on written policy
- managed under sound personnel practices—training, evaluation, and development are important to volunteers
- clear about job descriptions, the status of the volunteer, supervision, expectations as to work schedule, and consistent service
- clear about policies concerning insurance, use of library vehicles, and paid expenses
- cognizant of the need to recognize and show appreciation for volunteer work
- realistic in expectations of hours donated, types of work to be done, and the training required
- open to the community, in an effort to utilize the skills and talents of people who can contribute to the enhancement of library service

Has the board adopted a policy for volunteers?

Are there procedures in place for managing the volunteer program?