

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Many libraries form a Friends of the Library organization to help achieve a variety of short-term and long-term goals. The role of a Friends group is distinct from, but related to, the role of a board of trustees. The members of a Friends of the Library are civic minded people who know that quality library service is important to the life of a community and who are willing to volunteer their time and talents to help the library succeed.

Friends of the Library do many things

(depending upon local needs):

- Create public support and awareness for the library and its programs
- Raise money, for capital campaigns or for direct gifts for items not in the library's own budget
- Work for library legislation or increased appropriations
- Sponsor and support library programs and events
- Volunteer to work in the library or on specific tasks and projects

Friends of the Library groups are independent organizations, separate and distinct from the library and the library board. While their purpose is support of the library, Friends have a separate corporate existence and can even be chartered by the Board of Regents. They should have a separate federal tax exemption and their funds should not be mingled with the library's operating funds.

The independent corporate and financial status of Friends of the Library can be especially helpful in fundraising and budget vote campaigns. A library cannot use public funds to influence the outcome of an election, but a Friends group has no such limitation. The Friends can pay for postage, mailings,

and other publicity designed to create a favorable outcome in a funding vote.

Friends of the Library can be valuable members of the library team when they are organized carefully and when their purpose is clearly defined and structured. Trustees provide citizen control and governance of the library as required by law. The library director manages the operations of the library. The Friends of the Library provides an opportunity for interested citizens to assist in developing the library in ways identified in consultation with the board and

the director. It is essential that all parties in this arrangement understand the responsibilities and the limits of their roles. Frequent, clear, open communication about needs and expectations is the key to a successful Friends of the Library relationship.

Library boards can do a number of things to help and support Friends groups:

- be certain that there is a written policy statement about the Friends, their role, and their relationship to the board of trustees
- work with the Friends and the library director to be sure that Friends have clear and appropriate assignments and that their talents are being used well
- meet with the Friends board formally (perhaps semiannually) to help the Friends plan and define their goals
- appoint a library trustee to act as liaison to the Friends board
- be open and welcoming to suggestions, questions, and communication from the Friends