

CHAPTER TWENTY

Library Friends Groups

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Friends Organizations

Friends of the Library organizations exist in many Maine communities. Friends organizations are groups of citizens who join together to support, improve, and promote the library. Some are formally incorporated, not-for-profit bodies; some are informal groups of library supporters. (Information about establishing a Friends organization and ideas for Friends activities and projects is available from the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (United for Libraries) at www.ala.org/united/friends.)

As volunteers who actively support the library, Friends can be extremely helpful to the library in a number of ways. Friends often offer financial support for a special library program or service, advocate for the library budget or library capital project, and volunteer assistance with children’s summer reading programs and other services.

While the library board and the Friends share a common vision, they are separate, autonomous bodies—each with a distinct role. The two groups work together most effectively if they respect the distinct role of each organization. Below are a few suggestions that may help create an effective working relationship:

- Friends recognize that they do not perform a decision-making role for the library.
- The library board values and encourages input and opinions from the Friends.
- The library board appoints a liaison to the Friends (often the library director or other library staff member).
- Friends decide how to spend their funds only after conferring with the library director and library board or according to an established Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the library board.
- The library board provides the Friends with a “wish list” of items not included in the budget, to aid the Friends in their fund-raising efforts.
- The Friends’ activities support library board long-range plans and policies.
- The library board expresses appreciation to the Friends for their support and service.
- The library board invites and welcomes Friends to library board meetings, especially when discussing issues that may be of interest to the Friends.

Financial Support from Friends

It is important that library donations, including financial and material support from the Friends be used to enhance or enrich library services. The availability of

Friends' support should never be the occasion for reducing or replacing the community's commitment to public funding. Donors will stop donating and volunteers will stop working if they see that their efforts are resulting in reduced public funding for the library instead of improved service.

Often, Friends groups will underwrite a pilot project for a year or two until the value of the new service is proven in the community. They might provide assistance in the furnishing and/or decorating of the library building beyond bare necessities. They might make special collection enrichment gifts to help the library keep pace with an unanticipated increase in the need for special materials (to better serve Spanish-language residents or day-care centers, for example). In addition, Friends groups often provide financial support for special programming.

In many communities, the library donates withdrawn books to the local Friends organization for sale to the public. This practice probably falls within the authority of the library board; however, because public property is involved, special care should be taken. We recommend that the library board enter into a written agreement, or memorandum of understanding (MOU), with the Friends that makes clear that all proceeds from sale of the books (and any other materials) be used to support the programs and services of the library.

Sources of Additional Information

- Maine State Library webpage for Trustees and Friends www.maine.gov/msl/libs/admin/trustees.htm
- The Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF) at www.ala.org/united/friends has information about establishing a Friends organization and ideas for Friends activities and projects. It also has information on establishing a library foundation.
- Friends of Maine Libraries www.friendsofmainelibraries.org/
- The Foundation Center has information on establishing a non-profit organization at www.grantsspace.org/tools/Knowledge-Base/Nonprofit-Management/Establishment/starting-a-nonprofit
- United for Libraries Trustee Tip Sheet #2 (see Appendix D) "The Role of the Friends Board."
- United for Libraries Trustee Tip Sheet #4 (see Appendix D) "Sample Memorandum of Understanding"