

Starting a Friends Group

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Answer the basic question: what do you want the Friends group to be? What will Friends do? To succeed, Friends need the support of the board of trustees, the library director and the library staff. They need a clear sense of how their purpose is different and unique.

Recruit a Steering Committee to make decisions and do the paperwork

- Incorporate with the Secretary of State's office
- Write a constitution and bylaws
- Apply for tax exempt status
- Organize the first general meeting

The first meeting

- Discuss the focus of the group and possible projects
- Decide whether to charge dues and what the dues structure/categories should be
- Elect officers: Chair/president, Vice Chair/VP, Secretary, Treasurer
- Set a tentative annual calendar
- Recruit people to work on a few projects; membership? First fundraiser?
- Develop an interesting and rewarding activity, perhaps finding a good speaker

A few thoughts...

The Library director is usually the liaison to the Friends, attending meetings, offering suggestions, clarifying differences between Friends, trustee and staff roles. Neither the library director nor any trustee should hold an officer position in the Friends.

Trustees may be members of Friends and may help organize, but they should not dominate the group. Each organization has its own role.

Don't try to do too much in the first year; allow interest to build slowly.

What have Vermont Friends actually done?

- Provided "sunshine" gifts for staff birthdays and other important times
- Baked cookies on demand ("Cookie List" works for newcomers to the community)
- Offered a preview night gala before the booksale for Friends only (Colchester)
- Built a bookdrop in a grocery store or other location across town and emptied it regularly
- Created a Friends webpage off the library's website; see Fletcher Free Library, Wardsboro Library
- Held a pie sale along with the book sale (St. Johnsbury)
- Sold Christmas ornaments:
 - Pewter replicas of the library building or historic buildings in town (St. Johnsbury)
 - A different angel every year (Fair Haven)

Asked local artists to decorate bird houses, customized cheese boxes, or chairs with paint and other media. Sold sponsorships, held an artists' reception, then auctioned them off. (Rockingham)
 Bought a plastic banner or sign for the library to use in parades, at public gatherings, etc.
 Organized an annual party for library board, staff, volunteers, and Friends
 Sponsored an annual banquet and auction for Chinese New Year (Barre)
 Sorted books, priced them and staffed the annual booksale
 Created notecards, bookbags, or library blankets to sell
 Created a major tourist event, the Gilfeather Turnip Festival (Wardsboro)
 Ruffled monthly theme baskets with a book, food, objects, and a distinctive style
 Paid for well-attended summer programs for adults and children
 Held "Booked for Lunch" series on the 3rd Thursday of every month (Burlington)
 Sponsored three Opera For Everyone with bus, refreshments, lecture (Essex Junction)
 Held annual perennial plant sale
 Cooked Homegrown Dinner, a totally localvore event
 Supported children's programs (Friends of the Children's Library, Woodstock)

Resources for Friends

Library Development consultants are available from the VT Department of Libraries to answer questions, offer support and provide resources. Ask the library director how to contact the local consultant or call the central DOL number, (802) 828-3261 .

The Library Science collection at the Department of Libraries has current books on Friends, available via interlibrary loan. Check out the titles by Sally Gardner Reed, for starters.

WebJunction <http://www.webjunction.org> use the search box for Friends, and find the CT state handbook and many FOLUSA documents.

ALTAFF <http://www.ala.org/altaff> The ALA division that has replaced Folusa (Friends of Libraries USA). Individuals in ALA and ALTAFF or the Friends group can join as an affiliate to receive publications and online resources. Affiliates receive a subscription to The Voice , the bimonthly newsletter of ALTAFF and access to the Friends& Foundations Zone. Rates are based on library operating budget:, under \$1 million/yr: \$50.

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