



Friends and Foundations, Part Two: Is a merged Friends and Foundation right for your library?

BY PETER PEARSON

President, The Friends of the Saint Paul (Minn.) Public Library

The library world is one of the few that I'm aware of in which there are two separate and distinct support organizations which provide support for the same institution.

Library Friends groups have been in existence in many communities for more than 100 years. These venerable organizations have provided valuable service to their libraries, usually utilizing the skills of volunteers from the community with a strong interest in books and libraries. The typical activities of a library Friends group can include book sales, author programs, advocacy, fundraising events, and volunteer activities within library buildings.

Library Foundations, on the other hand, are a relatively new addition to the library support world. The majority of library Foundations have just been formed within the last 20 years. Unlike their counterparts, the library Friends groups, library Foundations tend to be staff driven. Activities of library Foundations tend to be higher level fundraising activities, including annual fund solicitations from individuals for special programs and projects, planned giving activities, corporate foundation grant writing and sponsorships, capital campaign fundraising for new and renovated buildings, and major gift solicitation from individuals.

In many communities, these two different and distinct support organizations operate side by side in support of the same library. Many times, the interaction between the two groups is very positive and their work is complementary. However, there are times when having two separate nonprofit organizations supporting the same library can create some overlap in responsibilities and some confusion on the part of the community at large.



A model of support which is gaining in popularity is what I refer to as “the merged model of a library Friends group and a library Foundation.” This merged model is the model which supports the Saint Paul Public Library in Minnesota, from which my experience arises. The activities of merged Friends and Foundations include all of the activities of the two organizations separately. So, for instance, a merged library Friends and Foundation organization can conduct book sales, author programs and advocacy activities, as well as all of the major fundraising activities, such as planned giving, major gifts, and capital campaign fundraising.

One of the keys to the success of a merged library Friends and Foundation is a comprehensive committee structure, which allows individuals from the Friends and the Foundation to engage in the activities for which they have the greatest passion. So, individuals who have a passion for used book sales would have an opportunity to pursue that activity, while individuals who prefer higher level fundraising activities would find committee activity relevant to these interests also.

There are a number of advantages to the merged model of a library Friends group and Foundation. Probably the most obvious advantage is

that there is only one nonprofit organization that needs to recruit board members and file annual papers with the state and localities, thus reducing administrative overhead to run two organizations.

A second strong advantage of the merged model is the time devoted by the library director and other key library staff in assisting the library support organizations. Library directors need to attend board meetings and committee meetings of their library support organizations, and having just one organization for this purpose can vastly reduce the amount of hours that library directors and staff spend in support of those organizations.

Another strength of the merged model is bringing together the two activities of advocacy and fundraising. These two activities are natural activities for all support organizations, and can be done most effectively when one organization has private funds at its disposal to use as matching funds to leverage new public dollars being requested through advocacy efforts.

But probably the strongest reason for considering a merged organization is how the community at large might understand the library and its support structures. Most individuals who are not part of the insider group of library support people will have a difficult time understanding the distinction between a library Friends group and a library Foundation. When we're looking to dramatically expand the number of people who make contributions to the library, the last thing we want to do is confuse these individuals with which organization does which activities. When a donor needs to ask, “Where do I write my check, to the Friends or the Foundation?,” the likely answer may be that the donor will write it to neither. Having just one organization makes it very clear where an individual's financial and volunteer support should go.



Libraries that have developed the merged library Friends and Foundation model typically note that these organizations are becoming extremely strong and vital, working closely with the library in all areas of interest to the library. And being able to show excellent results in fundraising and advocacy efforts also attracts good board members to an organization.

The other reason that these organizations can be popular is that the mission is broad enough to appeal to almost anyone in the community. Organizations whose sole purpose is to sell used books or whose sole purpose it is to raise private funds may have a limited number of board members who are attracted to their mission. The merged organizations of library Friends and Foundations can appeal to a broad cross section of every community.

The names associated with organizations like this which have merged a Friends group and Foundation are always a locally driven decision, and no one format seems to apply to all libraries. In St. Paul, the name of our organization has always been The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Locally, the name Friends carries a connotation of an organization with endowment funds and a track record of major fundraising and advocacy.

In San Francisco, which is also a merged model of Friends and Foundation, the merged organization first took the name “the Friends and Foundation of the San Francisco Public Library,” and then eventually went back to the name “Friends” in recent years. Again, these decisions are locally driven, and the name does not tend to have a major impact on the success of this model.

There appears to be more interest in the merged model than I’ve seen at any time in the past. I have provided consulting to libraries across the country in this area assessing the effectiveness of both organizations and helping libraries to determine whether or not a merged model is right for them. The important factors in deciding which way to go will be based on local needs and the history of each organization.

In any case, a change to a merged model should be done with a great deal of preliminary planning and the full involvement of both of the existing organizations to be certain that this is the right move for everyone involved. Even if a decision is made not to merge two support groups, the process of discussing the issue certainly helps to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the existing Friends and the existing Foundation. In these times of shrinking public resources, having efficient and effective library support organizations is more critical than ever.

For more information about The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, visit www.thefriends.org.

Peter Pearson has been president of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library for 16 years. Under his direction, The Friends has received numerous awards for successful advocacy, public relations, fundraising, and cultural programming. Pearson served on the board of Friends of Libraries U.S.A. (FOLUSA), and is currently the Foundation Section Chair on the ALTAFF board of directors. He provides consulting services to libraries and organizations throughout the country and is a frequent speaker at state and national library conferences.

This is part two of a two-part series on the dynamic between library Friends and Foundations. Part one ran in the January 2010 issue of *The Voice*. In part one, Jane Rutledge of Friends of the Tippecanoe County (Ind.) Public Library, discussed the missions of the library’s separate Friends group and Foundation, and how the two organizations work cooperatively. Both articles will be available on the ALTAFF Web site (www.ala.org/altaff) in the “Foundations” section.

Morgan Hill (Calif.) Library Foundation hosts Silicon Valley Puzzle Day

The Morgan Hill (Calif.) Library Foundation held the fourth annual Silicon Valley Puzzle Day, on Jan. 30-31.

Approximately 200 people participated in Puzzle Day events over the course of two days. Puzzle Day was organized by the Morgan Hill Library Foundation, and was originally started by the Friends of the Morgan Hill Library to raise money for art and furnishings for a new library. This is the Foundation’s first year organizing Puzzle Day.

On Saturday, workshops were held at the library from 10:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., and covered topics such as cryptarithms, “crosswordese,” Nikoli puzzles, and cryptic crosswords. Two workshops were held especially for children, “Sudoku for Kids” and “Fun Word Puzzles for Kids.” In addition, U.S. Sudoku champion Thomas Snyder spoke about solving puzzles in championship rounds. Mark Diehl and Andrea Carla Michaels, who have both written *New York Times* crosswords, spoke in a panel about crossword construction.

On Sunday, Sudoku, crossword, and cryptic crossword competitions were held. Among the judges was Tyler Hinman, who won has won the American Crossword Puzzle tournament for five consecutive years, and Wei-Hwa Huang, who designed Google’s four-week puzzle event DaVinci Code Quest. Competitors battled it out on giant boards in front of the room. Trophies were awarded to the top winner in each category, and prizes were awarded to children who competed, plus judge’s choice awards for best handwriting, best Morgan Hill puzzler, and to the person who had traveled the furthest to attend. Also featured was a giant “community puzzle” that attendees could gather around and work on together.

For information about the Morgan Hill Library Foundation, visit www.mhlf.org.