



# Challenges to Materials and Programs: The Role of Friends of the Library

## 1. Be Supportive of your Library Director

Book challenges, material challenges, and programming challenges are stressful for a library director. They are having to navigate questioned administration policies around collections and internal communications with their library Trustees or boards, while managing public-facing responses and a myriad of other administrative tasks. Make sure that your library director knows that the Friends of the Library are there to inspire and encourage, and to be a proactive resource in helping them to cope with the tribulations around these events.

## 2. Be Present, Speak Up

The love and passion a Friend member has for the library can be a powerful voice of support. Attending board meetings where these issues are being discussed and reviewed and adding moral support for the library director and the board members are essential. Augmenting and amplifying your support for the policies of the library as a voice in these meetings to highlight confidence in your library's director and the board is important. Writing opinion letters to the editor of your local newspaper supporting the library, the library director, their skills and expertise as librarians, and your own beliefs around censorship and material/program challenges serve as a strong voice of reason to the community.

## 3. Be the Supporter and Friend You Are

Library staff is at the front lines of these challenges. The pressures of their day-to-day job married with having to deal with new situations involving questions on library collections, programs, and policies have been trying especially during the pandemic. Look to see how the Friends members can acknowledge the staff's efforts and give encouragement. See what the Friends group can do to assist staff with administrative tasks that require less skilled work, freeing up time for the staff to work on upholding library policies during this time of challenges. Understanding, empathy, praise, and appreciation are all power tools giving strained staff sustenance. Sometimes just asking how someone is doing and letting them know that they are appreciated can make a positive difference in one's day.

## 4. Assess Fund Guidelines: Are the Friends Financially Able to Support the Library in Times of Crisis?

Funds raised by Friends groups are usually earmarked for specific use, from purchasing books and materials to bringing in authors or orchestrating special events. It is a good time for the Friends board to review its guidelines on spending. Do current state or federal laws or guidelines allow for budgetary spending to support the library director and library workers - either with legal fees, professional advice, or additional staff training? If so, then meet with your library director and see what's most needed.



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If not, consider amending current guidelines or establishing a specific fund to accommodate these unforeseen issues. In all cases, it is advisable to consult your Friends group's attorney if there's uncertainty as to whether a particular funding plan is appropriate for the organization.

### **5. Know Your Lane (and Stay in It)**

If or when a challenge comes, always keep in mind your appropriate role as a Friend vs. the role of the Trustees or Foundation board members. Also, understand the importance that designated professional staff has in managing challenges. Trustees, Foundation board members, and the library director have legally bestowed powers, responsibilities, and liabilities with regards to materials challenges and censorship. Be prepared to explain the library's values and policies and how they can raise their complaint formally. But never promise to personally resolve a complaint. A clear understanding of a Friend's role is vital.

### **6. Speak with One Voice**

During a challenge, it is critical that the library – Trustees/board members, Friends, library workers – speaks with a single voice. Not every challenge needs to become a crisis for the library. However, a strong crisis communication policy will ensure that if the challenge becomes the subject of public interest, all members know their role, to whom they can speak on the matter, and if so, what message to share.

### **7. Stay Informed**

The current trends around challenges, whether around books, search terms, or programming, is very shifting. As with many issues, understanding where to find trustworthy information is important. These issues may not be currently impacting your community, but understanding what's occurring elsewhere in the country better prepares us to manage when these issues start having a direct impact on your library. Following how other libraries handle these challenges can also give you a sense of what to do — and what not to do — when you face a similar situation. The blog of ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom is one great resource to follow to keep tabs on trends with challenged materials and programs around the country: [www.oif.ala.org/oif](http://www.oif.ala.org/oif)

### **8. Know Your Library's Policies**

All libraries have policies and procedures that serve as foundations for the good work they do for their community. Be familiar with policies around collection development, the use of meeting room space, programming directives, and the library's mission in the community. It is equally important during times of challenges or crisis to know the libraries' communication policy, policy around censorship, and the review process for questioned materials. Material challenges are replete with legal issues. Do not add to the problem by trying to resolve issues without first looking to your library director and library Trustees or board for guidance.



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