

fact sheet #1

for Friends and Foundations

HOW TO ORGANIZE A FRIENDS GROUP

Every library needs Friends. Whether you are a community member or librarian, congratulations! By starting a Friends group you'll be giving an important gift to the community.

1. If you are a librarian, reach out to some of your most faithful and energetic volunteers or a few of your most devout patrons to start a small steering committee. If you are a library lover who wants to start a group, contact your librarian and share your plans. It is critical to the success of the group that the librarian and the Friends' steering committee work closely together.
2. The steering committee should reflect the community. Again, it should include the librarian and a small core of active volunteers and/or patrons. It is important to have access to an attorney, public relations and advertising talent, and high profile leaders.
3. Determine the group's purpose and mission so that you can plan an organizational structure to accomplish them. This structure will include the executive planning team and task forces to carry out the group's projects and programs. A structure that is based on task forces will engage many more people than one that relies on standing committees. (See Toolkit #1, "Libraries Need Friends: A Toolkit to Create Friends Groups or to Revitalize the One You Have.")
4. Work on federal and state tax-exempt status with a lawyer's help so that when you collect dues they will be deductible. At the same time, work on developing the group's constitution and by-laws. Visit the United for Libraries website for materials that will provide you with sample by-laws and assistance for writing your constitution.
5. Determine what your dues structure will be. Consider a structure that will optimize both the number of members who will join and your ability to raise funds through dues. Starting with a low student or retired rate and increasing the dues incrementally for "higher" categories of giving should accomplish both objectives.
6. Once you have developed an organizational structure and have 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, you will want to embark on a membership drive. This will probably include a direct mailing and a membership brochure to hand out at the library, doctor's offices, grocery stores, and other places where members might be recruited. Use every form of social media available to broaden your reach.

7. Design a professional looking brochure for the membership drive. The brochure doesn't have to be expensive but it does have to look professional. Be sure that you include a space for new members to become active participants and volunteers in the organization. Follow-up right away to involve those who want to volunteer!
8. Hold your first "all member" meeting following the membership drive. This meeting should include a program component to attract a high attendance. At this program/meeting, elect officers and committee chairs to set and accomplish the group's goals.
9. The executive leadership team should begin to plan for the year ahead, designing programs and projects that will raise funds and public awareness for the library.
10. Join United for Libraries to get access to our special toolkit "Incorporating and Tax Exempting Procedures for Friends," and host of other materials and advice to help you do what you do even better!
11. Download the free toolkit "Libraries Need Friends: Starting a Friends Group or Revitalizing the One You Have" at www.ala.org/united/friends.

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