

2025 CANADIAN FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY SURVEY RESULTS

November 2025



CONTENTS

- CONTENTS..... 2**
 - List of Figures..... 3
 - Author and Participants..... 3
- INTRODUCTION..... 4**
 - Friends of Canadian Libraries..... 5
 - 2025 Survey..... 5
 - Author Notes..... 6
- SURVEY FINDINGS..... 7**
 - Structure and Profile..... 7
 - Membership..... 8
 - Fundraising..... 9
 - Advocacy..... 12
 - Other Initiatives..... 13
 - Strengths..... 14
 - Challenges..... 15
 - Skills and Self-Assessments..... 16
- OVERALL INSIGHTS..... 18**
 - Find Talent in the Community..... 18
 - Build Digital Champions..... 19
 - Create Local Partnerships & Challenge "The Way We've Always Done It"..... 19
 - Network with Friends..... 20
- RESOURCES..... 21**
 - Canadian Friends of the Library Resources..... 21
 - American Friends of the Library Resources..... 22

“Use your library. Cherish it. Fight for it. Love it.”
– Lois Hole

List of Figures

Figure 1. Province.....	7
Figure 2. Legal structure.....	7
Figure 3. Membership numbers.....	8
Figure 4. Member recruitment.....	8
Figure 5. Amount raised in past year.....	9
Figure 6. Fundraisers in past 5 years.....	10
Figure 7. Advocacy activities in past 5 years.....	12
Figure 8. Overall self-assessments.....	16
Figure 9. Digital tools.....	17

Author and Participants

Author: Graeme Matichuk

Participants:

- Advocates for Airdrie Public Library Society
- Anne Grover Library Society
- Coaldale Public Library Friends Society
- Drumheller Library Society
- Friends of Crowsnest Community Library Society
- Friends of London Public Library
- Friends of St. Albert Public Library
- Friends of Strathcona County Library
- Friends of the Antigonish Library
- Friends of the Beaverlodge Public Library Society
- Friends of the Deep River Public Library
- Friends of the East Gwillimbury Library
- Friends of the Edson Public Library Society
- Friends of the Grand Forks and District Public Library
- Friends of the Haliburton County Public Library
- Friends of the Halton Hills Public Library
- Friends of the Okotoks Library Association
- Friends of the Rideau Lakes Public Library
- Friends of the Sangudo Public Library Society
- Friends of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library
- Friends of the Stony Plain Library
- Friends of the Valleyview Library
- Friends of the Vancouver Public Library
- Friends of Vermilion Public Library Society
- Les amis de la bibliothèque de Montréal
- Society of Friends of the Red Deer Public Library
- Society of the Friends of the Pincher Creek Library
- The Friends of the Greater Sudbury Public Library
- The Friends of the Spruce Grove Public Library
- The Friends of the Wasaga Beach Public Library

Friends Helping Friends is a philosophy that we are stronger when we work together.

INTRODUCTION

Seven years ago, the Friends of St. Albert Public Library began networking with other Friends groups. We realized we weren't alone in the challenges we faced. We invited Friends groups to our meetings from nearby communities like Spruce Grove and Beaumont and held conversations with groups as far as Lahaina, Maui and Kingston, Ontario.

The result was transformative. We shared ideas, pooled knowledge, and realized we didn't have to solve every problem alone. This is where *Friends Helping Friends* emerged.



Today, many of us see the value in expanding beyond our regional cluster and networking with more groups across the country to learn about one another's work. We also see value in demonstrating the impact of Friends groups, because we know much of this work happens quietly but is critical to so many libraries. And if we can raise the profile of our groups and learn from each other, it could help us boost our group memberships and draw greater funding from local partners, while ultimately contributing to our shared visions of supporting our local libraries.

“Collaboration with other Friends groups will only make us stronger and more successful.”

Friends of Canadian Libraries

Canada's national Friends organization, The Friends of Canadian Libraries (FOCAL), dissolved in 2016. This organization connected hundreds of Friends of the Library groups across the country with training, resources, and networking opportunities, with many of their resources still living on as essential reference materials for Friends groups.



After the dissolution of FOCAL, some provinces, like Ontario, developed committees to support their province's Friends groups. However, most Friends around the country are working in isolation, not part of any larger association, with limited resources and only local insights.

Friends Helping Friends is a way we can rebuild a Friends network from the grassroots. Today, it is an informal community, but in the future it could be something larger.

Earlier in 2025, I contacted Jami van Haaften, a past-president of FOCAL and the current steward of its Facebook community, asking about previous survey efforts. She shared the results from their 2010 and 2015 surveys as well as many resources FOCAL developed over the years.

2025 Survey

This 2025 survey was an opportunity to reconnect Friends groups and find a pulse-check from those who participated. While it cannot represent all Friends groups across Canada, it gives a good snapshot of successes, challenges, and opportunities we all can learn from. Since it is the first national Friends survey in a decade, it also gives us a starting point for more regular surveys of Friends groups. We're building this from the ground up and are optimistic that more groups will participate in the years to come.

To hear from Friends groups, I reached out to my network and the provincial and territorial library associations. I also directly contacted many Friends groups across the country who have listed emails publicly on their websites, and Jami van Haaften distributed it to her network. One challenge is that not all Friends groups have email addresses. A good approach for future surveys would be to continue building relationships with Friends

groups and contacting provincial, territorial, or regional library associations, who can then have their member libraries directly contact their current Friends volunteers.

This survey gathered stats on membership, fundraising dollars, legal structure, and more. But it also dove deeper with open response questions to learn about strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Initial findings were shared at the Stronger Together Library Conference in October 2025, during a session in which I spoke to the insights and potential solutions

gleaned from the survey and facilitated an interactive exercise to help libraries and their Friends group work through challenges they are facing.



Readers of this report may be Friends group volunteers, library staff or leadership, or library board trustees. Whichever world you come from, I hope you learn valuable insights from this report to help improve your Friends of the Library.

– Graeme Matichuk

Author Notes

Graeme Matichuk is a library lover, community engagement specialist, architectural designer, and accessibility advocate. Born in St. Albert and now based in Edmonton, Graeme has built a 360-degree perspective on public libraries over 15 years in the industry and a lifetime visiting libraries. He has worked as a library staff member, a library advocate and volunteer, and a consultant designing library facilities and leading strategic planning. As President of the Friends of St. Albert Public Library, he led organizational transformation to introduce digital tools, a fresh visual identity, new fundraising opportunities, and increased membership. He was also involved in rebooting the Friends of Edmonton Public Library. Graeme currently leads Matichuk Insights - a small business offering consulting for community engagement, public libraries, and accessibility - and works at a municipality in public engagement strategy.

The 2025 Canadian Friends of the Library National Survey is a pro-bono project sponsored by Matichuk Insights. Participation in the survey was voluntary and no financial incentives were offered for any participants.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Structure and Profile

The 2025 Canadian Friends of the Library Survey heard from **30 Friends groups across Canada**. The majority were from Alberta and Ontario, with BC, Nova Scotia, and Québec also represented.

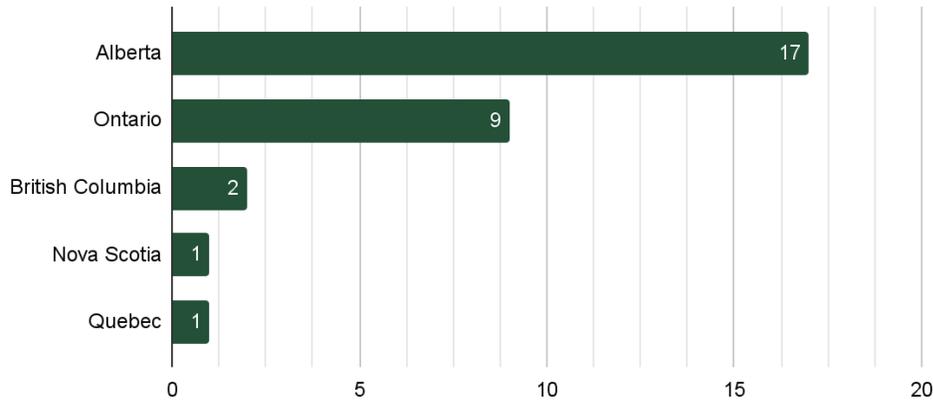


Figure 1. Province

In terms of **legal structure**, half of the groups are federally-registered charities (15). Others indicated varying provincial or federal registration, while five said they are unincorporated volunteer groups.

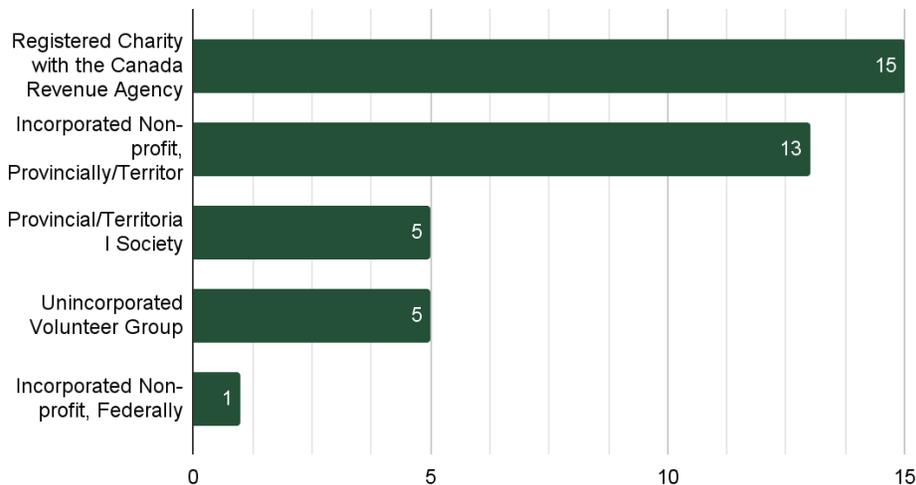


Figure 2. Legal structure

Membership

Membership statistics were generally low. Most Friends groups surveyed have fewer than 20 members, with 12 groups having between 11 and 20 members and 13 groups having fewer than 11 members. Five groups have more than 30 members. This demonstrates a small volunteer base for most of the Friends groups surveyed.

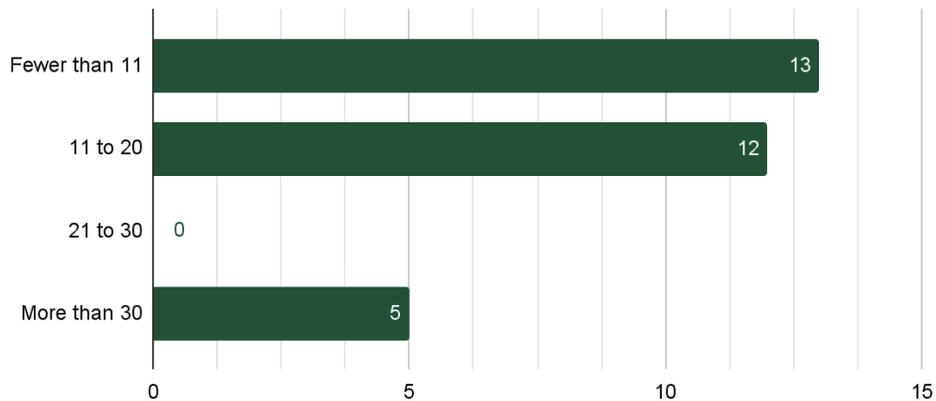


Figure 3. Membership numbers

To recruit members, most respondents said they rely on in-library brochures/displays (22 groups) or social media (21 groups). They also use their library's website (18 groups), library staff referrals (16 groups), and community events (14 groups).

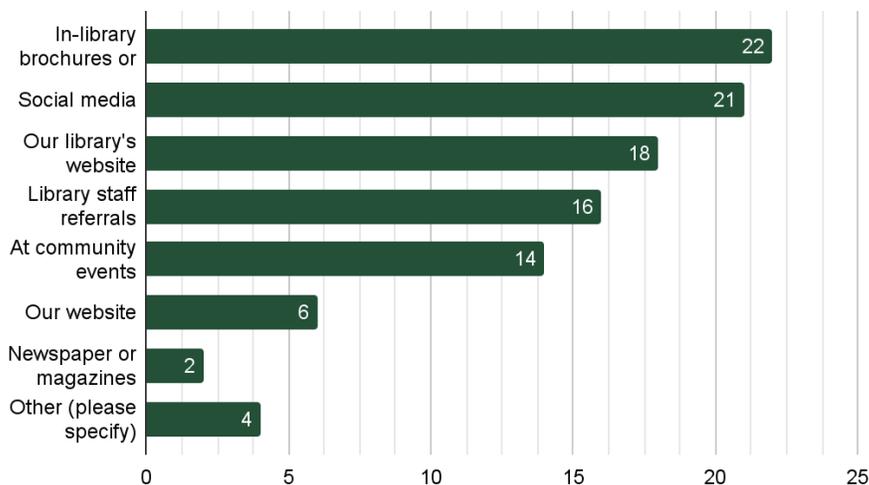


Figure 4. Member recruitment

Fundraising

Eleven of the 30 Friends groups surveyed raised between \$2,001 and \$10,000 in the past year. Five said they raised over \$50,000.

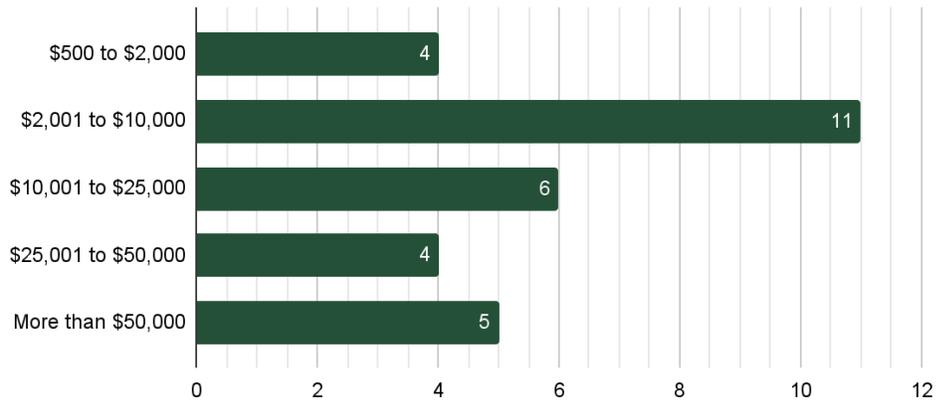


Figure 5. Amount raised in past year



The **most common sources of funds** were used book sales (23 groups), membership fees (13 groups), raffles or 50/50s (13 groups), selling merchandise (11 groups), and casinos (9 groups). Other common fundraisers included movie nights, silent auctions, selling food items, and author events.

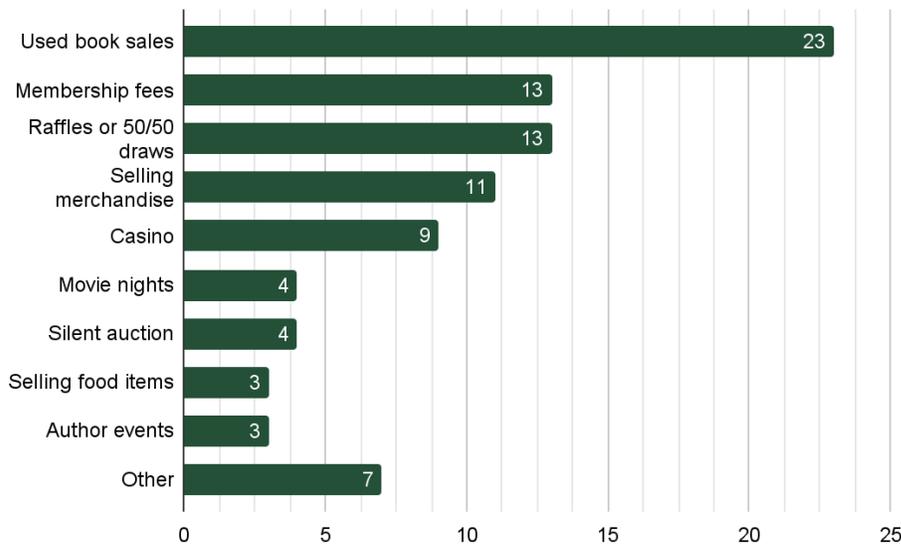


Figure 6. Fundraisers in past 5 years

Additional ideas written were weekly bridge games, “shabby chic fundraiser”, bottle drives, fashion exchange, purse sales, garage sales, “fun drive” through Value Village, grant writing, and community dinners.

When asked what their **most successful fundraisers** were in the past 5 years, we most frequently heard about Alberta casino fundraising and book sales, which were each reported by 11 Friends groups.

In Alberta, charities registered with the provincial gaming agency (AGLC) can apply to manage one casino event every three to five years and receive a portion of the casino’s profit. The casinos generate significant revenue for Friends groups, with several reporting in the survey earnings of over \$30,000. Some Friends groups said that they supplement their casino earnings with other fundraisers, like book sales, while one said that casinos have become their sole source of revenue. The AGLC places strict restrictions on the use of these funds.

Groups that run book sales described it as a “reliable revenue stream” and that “people look forward to it every year.” One mentioned that they pivoted to collection donations for book sales rather than pricing items individually and have seen increased revenue with this model.

Respondents also described innovative fundraisers like garage sales, jewelry sales, crochets “bookworm” sales, and a partnership with a local high school to sell painted Adirondack chairs to local businesses.



Events were also seen as major fundraising opportunities:

- An annual Mother’s Day Tea that sells out every year, hosting over 200 people the week before Mother’s Day
- A comedy night gala for the library’s 80th anniversary
- Movie nights (3 groups), with one group that pairs it with a wine reception
- Author events (2 groups), with book sales at the event to support the authors, including one group partnering with their local bookstore
- Silent auctions (3 groups), with one group auctioning paintings from local artists and merchandise from local businesses
- 50/50 raffles (2 groups), with one group using the online Rafflebox platform

“Annual Garage Sale. We collect donations from the community and utilize donated space at the local arena to run a 2-day garage sale. All items are 'sold' by donation.”

“The sale of books weeded from 30 libraries in the city of Montréal.”

Translated from French

Advocacy

Friends groups surveyed mainly engage in grassroots advocacy through conversations with their networks (25 groups) and online promotions (16 groups). Many also engage in conversations with elected officials (11 groups).

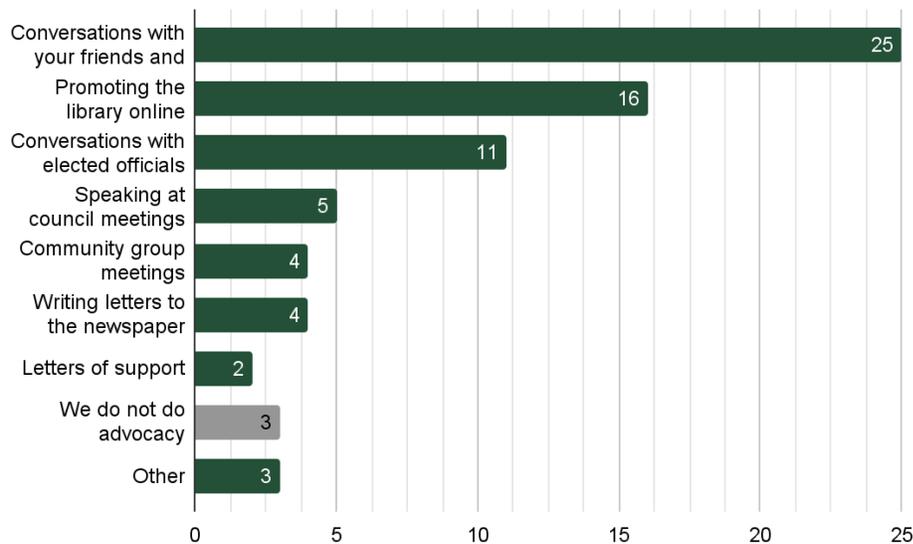


Figure 7. Advocacy activities in past 5 years

Feedback written in the “other” field referred to regular activities or outreach activities like meetings with the library CEO and sharing used books with seniors homes and the hospital. One group wrote in the other field that advocacy is not a major focus of theirs.



In written feedback, Friends groups wrote about their **most successful advocacy efforts** in the past 5 years. Most framed their advocacy efforts as having a community presence and outreach activities or building partnerships with other organizations (8 groups). Six mentioned online promotion or social media, and five said word of mouth. Four said that they have not focused on advocacy or it has not been very successful. Overall, the Friends groups surveyed do not have a strong focus on advocacy but some see an opportunity to improve in this area.

“As a grassroots organization we are most successful promoting the library and its programs directly to members of the community.”

“The need for greater advocacy is something we have discussed but have not developed a plan. We need one.”

Other Initiatives

We heard about other initiatives including the following:

- Social evening event at the library with a silent auction
- Casino fundraisers
- Dinner galas
- Several author events annually
- Approaching specific businesses with direct funding asks
- Recruitment drive with raffle prizes to bring in new members
- Annual garage sale with space offered by the local arena
- Selling fertilizer from a local business
- “Benefit day” at a local restaurant
- Mother’s Day Tea event
- Community suppers
- Volunteering at senior and child focused library events
- Organizing literacy programs
- Supporting petitions for school libraries
- Supporting summer reading programs and literacy projects

Strengths

Friends groups surveyed shared what they see as their **main strengths**:

- Their members are hard-working, passionate, dedicated supporters who have a strong desire to be involved.
- Teams are well-organized, reliable, and "fantastically efficient" with minimal administrative costs and "excellent leadership." One group said they are a "small core but they get things done" and another said they are "willing to volunteer man hours."
- Several feel their relationships with their libraries are strong.
- Many spoke about their long history of successful fundraising with book sales that are well-managed and run by dedicated Friends volunteers.
- Several said they have members with helpful skills coming from backgrounds such as accounting, engineering, teaching, and stay-at-home parents, each bringing different strengths to the group. Volunteers were described as knowledgeable and skilled.
- While many described their volunteers as long-term supporters with strong retention rates, we also heard from a group that has benefited from newer members bringing fresh ideas and technology skills.

"The members of our Society are its strength. They are all committed to realizing our stated vision of a community in which all members have the literacy skills they need to thrive and be successful. We are enthusiastic and have fun at our meetings and while working on our projects."

"We have a core membership of people who believe in volunteering, and specifically the library – believing that the library is the backbone of our community."

Challenges

Friends groups surveyed also shared what they see as their **main challenges**:

- Most are concerned about their aging membership and the difficulty they face in replacing retiring board members. They worry about succession planning.
- A small, dedicated core group of volunteers often carries the weight of Friends group efforts. This concern is magnified in small towns where dedicated volunteers might be supporting several organizations and reaching their own capacities. The challenge is particularly concerning in leadership roles, which many groups say are difficult to fill.
- A few groups indicated resource constraints, mostly around their volunteer team's capacity and funding.
- Many respondents said their members have low confidence with technology. While some have created websites and social media, these groups wrote about challenges they face with maintaining digital tools with limited expertise on their team.
- Some are facing organizational issues with high member turnover, conflicts with their library board or library staff, difficulties in navigating paperwork and regulatory bodies.

"Our members are reluctant to take on leadership roles and many are facing health or older age concerns which means they have had to step down from their roles."

"Our technology skills and tools are very limited. For example, our web page is very rudimentary, and our volunteer application form and membership forms are paper only."

Skills and Self-Assessments

When asked to **self-assess the state of their Friends group** across seven questions, respondents demonstrated strong agreement with all of the statements. Of the 30 groups who responded, 26 strongly agreed that their work is meaningful and 22 strongly agreed that they feel supported by their library.

There was the most uncertainty around confidence with digital/online tools (7 groups were neutral, and 3 groups strongly or somewhat disagreed) and having the technology they need (8 groups were neutral, and 2 groups somewhat disagreed).

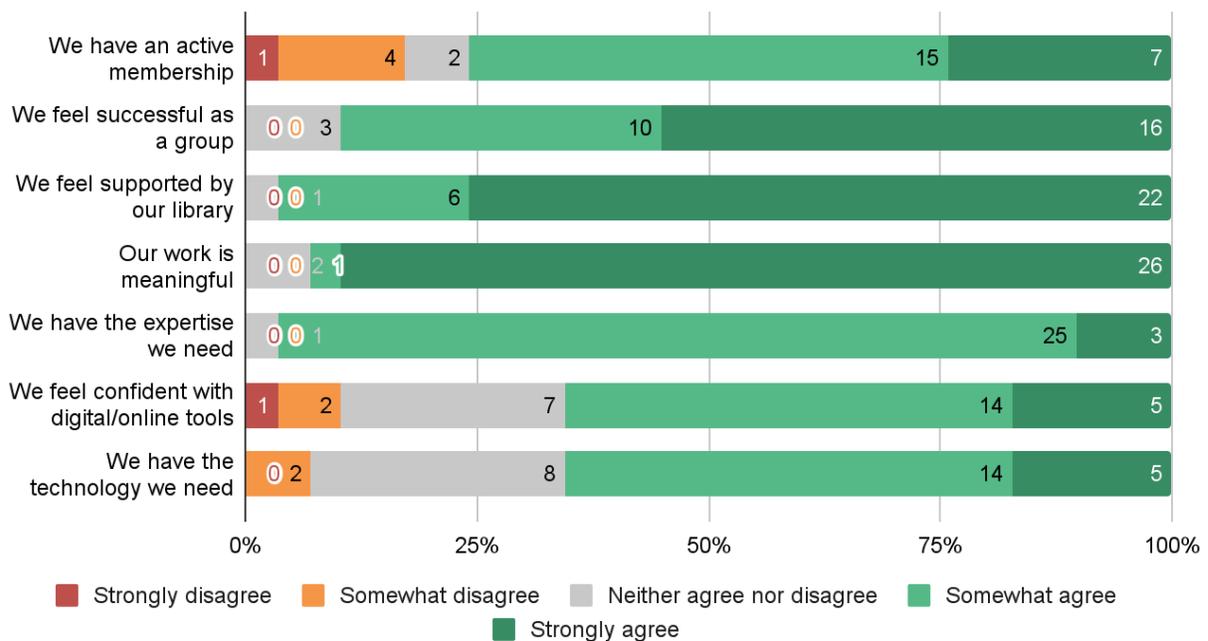


Figure 8. Overall self-assessments

They had the opportunity to provide more context in a written field. Five groups wrote about low confidence with technology, with one group saying that their younger members are but their older members are not. Two wrote that library staff help them with technology. Some identified that their lack of technology resources was due to funding constraints (3 groups). Some wrote



that they feel very supported by their library, while one group said that support is dependent on the board at the time and another said that library staff have made it challenging to hold fundraisers at their library. Three groups noted that their Friends Board is active, but one of those mentioned that their general membership is not very active.

When asked specifically about which **digital tools** they use, most Friends groups said they use social media (24 groups). Other digital tools are used by some: virtual meetings (10 groups), email newsletter (8 groups), online events platform (7 groups), their own website (7 groups), and online file storage (6 groups).

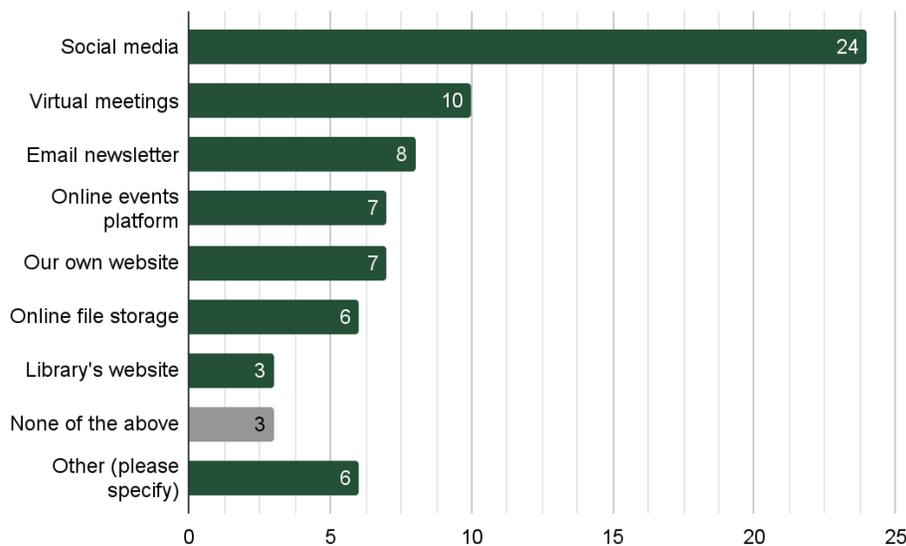


Figure 9. Digital tools

Some respondents offered **additional thoughts** in the closing question:

- Networking with other Friends groups is valuable and will make them stronger
- Friends groups should be more than just fundraising
- Sharing their successes such as casino fundraisers, growing membership, major donations to their libraries, and supportive library staff and library boards
- Sharing their challenges including the need for more members to take on leadership roles and difficulties with AGLC casino fundraising paperwork

"I am proud of our membership which continues to grow each year. I believe that everyone gives 100% as long as it is something in their comfort zone."

OVERALL INSIGHTS

From these survey results, we gleaned key insights on challenges and related opportunities for Friends groups to explore.

Find Talent in the Community

Challenge: Most Friends groups surveyed have a small volunteer base. Most have 20 or fewer members and shared concerns about succession planning, particularly with an aging volunteer base holding essential board positions. In a time when volunteer recruitment is challenging across all sectors, small volunteer bases combined with difficulties in succession planning is a fragile situation.

Opportunity: A general call for volunteers is not always the most effective approach. Many survey respondents said that their members' diverse skill sets are a great asset. Targeted, skills-based recruitment in the community can bring in specific talent, like for digital marketing and accounting, while demonstrating to potential recruits the specific ways they will contribute to the group's success. "Gig volunteering" approaches, where volunteers are recruited to help with specific events or tasks on a short-term basis, can also help fill gaps in volunteer roles. This can be appealing to Millennials and Gen Zs, who often seek flexibility and purpose in their volunteering.

Example: The Friends of Strathcona County Library introduced Volunteer Connector to the Friends of St. Albert Public Library. The St. Albert group shifted from general volunteer calls to the community to offering specific positions with roles and responsibilities on this online volunteer portal which has attracted several new members who are joining with specific expertise or interest tailored to these roles.

Build Digital Champions

Challenge: While most Friends groups surveyed used social media, some expressed low confidence with digital tools and technology. Many respondents specifically mentioned that their members are not comfortable with technology, which creates barriers to adopting new approaches to member recruitment, promoting fundraisers, and building advocacy efforts. This skills gap may also increase reliance on library staff rather than ensuring self-sufficiency in the Friends group.

Opportunity: The entire membership does not have to have digital expertise - all it takes is one or two “digital champions” to lead the charge of introducing modern tools, such as building a website, creating and growing social media accounts, and weaving online event ticketing and e-newsletter tools into the group’s operations. This approach can help modernize the Friends group without overwhelming long-term volunteers who may prefer traditional roles. Plus, it can potentially attract new members interested in skills-based volunteer opportunities.

Example: The Friends of St. Albert Public Library created a Marketing Chair position which assigned the specific responsibility of digital marketing and online tools to a team member who was particularly interested in contributing these skills to the group. A new team member has since been recruited and trained to continue building and improving on social media, e-newsletter, online ticketing, Google Drive, and other digital tools.

Create Local Partnerships & Challenge "The Way We've Always Done It"

Challenge: Most Friends groups surveyed rely on book sales and Alberta casino fundraising for their revenue. While these may be successful legacy fundraisers, relying on a small selection of fundraising opportunities creates risk if regulatory measures change, availability of space for book sales is interrupted, or there are insufficient members to support these fundraising events.

Opportunity: Friends groups can build long-term sustainability by diversifying their fundraising revenue streams with innovative partnerships and fundraising ideas. When we rely on “the way we’ve always done it,” we may miss opportunities for growth and innovation. Innovation in fundraising can build community pride, introduce new members and partners, and protect revenue.

Example: Survey responses included specific examples of interesting community partnerships like partnering with the local high school to build Adirondack chairs and selling them to local businesses, partnering with a local business to sell locally-produced fertilizer, and introducing social fundraising events that bring the community together.

Network with Friends

Challenge: Since the dissolution of Friends of Canadian Libraries in 2016, most Friends groups have been working in isolation. Survey respondents demonstrated a strong desire for networking across the country and indicated it would benefit their group, but there is no clear pathway to build these connections.

Opportunity: Building a national Friends network could be a helpful way to foster learning opportunities between groups and help problem-solve shared challenges. A good starting point would be to facilitate informal knowledge-sharing where groups can share what has worked for them in operations, governance, fundraising, and advocacy in a low-cost but high-impact way. Ultimately, Friends groups can all help each other.

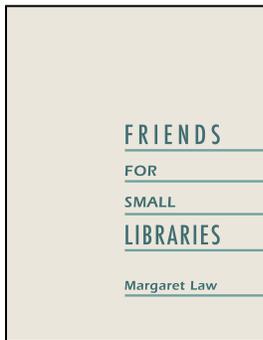
“In a world of changes, contributing to the health of your library is one of the only legacies that really lasts. And in building a legacy for your loved ones, you’re also investing in a more literate, more enlightened world.”

– Lois Hole

RESOURCES

As you take learnings and ideas from this report, you may be looking for detailed resources. There are many available in print and online with tips on Friends member recruitment, governance, advocacy, and operations in Canada and the United States.

Canadian Friends of the Library Resources



Friends for Small Libraries by Dr. Margaret Law is a helpful guide for Friends groups that are forming or refocusing their efforts. While it is currently out of print, libraries across the country have copies in their collections.



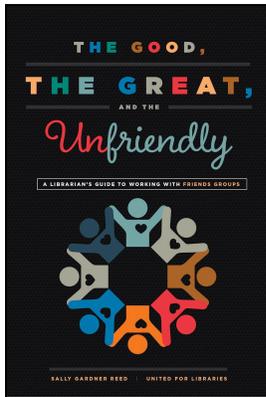
The [Ontario Library Association Friends Committee webpage](#) includes PDF resources from the former Friends of Canadian Libraries (FOCAL) group, developed over the course of two decades by Dorothy Macnaughton, Jami van Haften, and FOCAL partners.



Key resources on the OLA Friends Committee website:

- A Step-by-Step Guide to Starting a Friends Group
- Maintaining a Successful Friends Group
- How to Revitalize Your Friends Group
- Roles and Relationships Chart

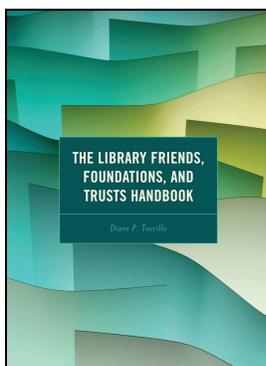
American Friends of the Library Resources



The Good, the Great, and the Unfriendly: A Librarian's Guide to Working with Friends Groups by Sally Gardner Reed gives a comprehensive understanding of Friends groups in the United States. It is published by United for Libraries under American Library Association Editions.



All Ages Welcome: Recruiting and Retaining Younger Generations for Library Boards, Friends Groups, and Foundations includes insights for member recruitment for younger age groups. It is published by United for Libraries under American Library Association Editions.



The Library Friends, Foundations, and Trusts Handbook is a resource for fundraising ideas, governance, and operations of Friends groups in the United States. It is published by Bloomsbury Publishing.



The [American Library Association's United for Libraries website](#) has many resources for Friends groups and regular webinar learning opportunities. United for Libraries is the national group for Friends, Foundations, and board trustees in the United States under the American Library Association.