

The Relationship Between Friends, Staff and The Library Board

By Jami van Haaften, Treasurer, Friends of Canadian Libraries

Friends of the Library and Library Board Trustees have much in common. They share a passion for their library. They are involved in advocacy and fundraising efforts; and they volunteer their time to make the library a success, by enhancing programs, services and collections. How can you contribute to an organizational culture that provides a supportive, co-operative and welcoming environment for your Friends of the Library?



Arms Length Relationship

The Friends of the Library are an independent, autonomous group. Their mission is to support the library.

There are examples, especially in smaller libraries, where a Library Board Trustee may be a member of the Friends group. In fact, the initiative to form a Friends of the Library group is often taken by a

Library Board Trustee. However, the Trustee should be careful not to direct activities of the Friends or take part in their decision-making process. The membership should be ex-officio, so that the Trustee is not voting on or directing the business matters of the Friends.

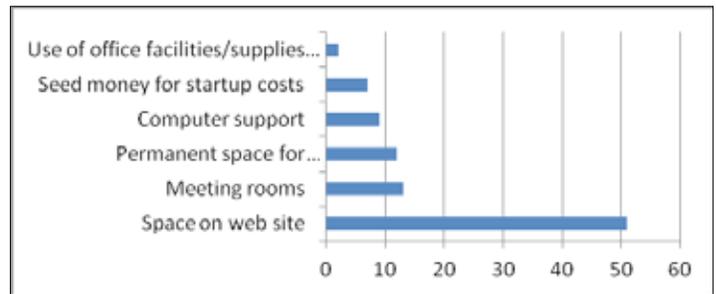
The roles and responsibilities are best outlined in a chart produced by the Southern Ontario Library Service. This excerpt underlines the distinction between library governance, management, day-to-day operations, and the support role played by Friends of the Library groups.

Communication

One method of improving communication and avoiding confusion and misunderstanding is to have liaison between the Friends and the Library Board, and the Friends and the library staff. A member of the Friends group can attend regular meetings of the Library Board, and vice versa. This will help the Friends understand the Library Board's priorities and goals. Friends could provide a monthly report to the Library Board to keep

them informed of Friends activities. The library's CEO or a library staff member attends Friends meetings. They can update the Friends on library programs and services, answer questions, help to schedule events such as Friends' book sales into the library's calendar, and bring a 'wish list' of funding needs.

In a national survey of Friends groups, conducted by Counting Opinions in 2010, we found the relationship between the Friends and the Library Board appears strong. A member of the Library Board attends Friends meetings and vice versa (21%). The Library director is ex-officio member of Friends Board (15%). Almost half (43%) report a library staff member is dedicated to the Friends group.



The communication should be open, two-way, and respectful. The Friends should provide regular updates, or at the very least, an annual report to the Library Board, which summarizes activities of the past year, money raised, and expenditures. Good communication will make everyone aware of what is going on, through newsletters, the exchange of minutes of meetings, and information conversations.

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	BOARD	CEO	STAFF	FRIENDS
Role	Policy and planning; accountability	Administration Planning and procedures	Implementation Administration as delegated	Fundraising Volunteer support
	ADVOCACY			

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Support/Sustain

Support from the library comes in many forms, according to the 2010 survey, ranging from seed money to get started, presence on the library website, use of meeting rooms, space for sales, book storage, and free parking.

Volunteer Management

In many Friends groups, library staff play a role in volunteer management, in order to ensure members of their Friends group have received the necessary orientation and training. The Friends are your library ambassadors both in the library and in the community.

“No matter how well intentioned volunteers are, unless there is an infrastructure in place to support or direct their efforts, they will remain ineffective at best . . .”

(www.ppv.org)

They should be knowledgeable about the facility, health

and safety aspects of their tasks, and able to respond appropriately to questions. Job descriptions, informal supervision and some skills training to take advantage of a volunteer’s experience and interests will make the volunteer feel their contributions are valued.

“40% of volunteers stop volunteering because of one or more poor volunteer management practices”

(www.urbaninstitute.org)

Volunteer recognition, both formal and informal, is important. It should be ongoing. Do library staff members know the names of their Friends who are in the library regularly? Do they say “thank you”? Is there an annual social event where volunteer hours are recognized? All of these strategies will improve volunteer enthusiasm and commitment.

Invest in your Friends. When Friends feel supported and valued, they will give of their time and energy to the Library in many ways. ■