

FRIENDS GROUP + FIRST AID

Your Friends Group isn't functioning as well as it could. Here are some concrete steps to get you back on track.

Check your assumptions

The Friends Group exists to support your library. The details of how that gets done and how money is allocated should be clearly defined in an Operating Agreement. If you don't have one, now is the time to develop one in partnership with your library staff. There's a sample attached. You can find it online here: <http://www.ala.org/united/friends/orgtools>

Clarify your mission

A clear mission statement will inform your group's goals and structure, so be sure to start with that. If you don't have one, or if your current statement isn't useful or is outdated, there's an exercise book attached that can help.

Clarify roles

The librarians are trained professionals, tasked with ensuring that the library is well-run and managed. The passionate members of the Friends Group are tasked with understanding the library's needs, and figuring out the best way to help meet those needs. Be mindful of staff time, and don't ask library staff to take on extra work unless that's been discussed in the Operating Agreement.

Build in good communication

Good communication is critical to good working relationships. Build it into your regular operations.

- ✓ Attend each other's board meetings as observers. You'll gain a great understanding of the work that's being done. If invited, you can share insights or information.
- ✓ The Friends Group board president and the library director or designated staff should make a point of having regular check-ins.
- ✓ Keep each other in the loop by e-mail. Share conversations about meetings, special events and news.

Educate yourself

There are many excellent resources for board development and training. Here are our top three:

- ✓ United for Libraries: American Library Association has lots of free resources for Friends Groups and Boards <http://www.ala.org/united/>
- ✓ Library Strategies: this offshoot of the Friends of the St. Paul Public Library publishes a great blog. <http://librarystrategiesconsulting.org/blog/>
- ✓ National Council for Nonprofits maintains free resources for board development and fundraising. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources-categories/boards-and-governance>

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