



# Friends of Libraries Section

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*The mission of the Friends of Libraries Section is to promote and inspire local Friends groups in libraries of all types for the betterment of New York State's library community.*

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## **The Purpose and Mission of Friends of the Library Organizations**

"I volunteer at the library. We have a group, the Friends of the Library." Your neighbor asks, "So what exactly do the Friends do?" "Well, we sort books donated for the book sale." But in your mind you're thinking, "That's a wimpy answer. How do I explain to her how important the Friends are to the life of the library?"

### **What is the purpose of this vital volunteer support group?**

One of the first steps in establishing or revitalizing a Friends organization is to clearly determine the group's initial purpose(s). "Initial" because the purpose(s) will vary depending on the library's and the community's needs and may change over time, reflecting the interests of the active members once the group has been established. The purpose guides the group's future decisions on its work agenda, its plan of service, and how to utilize the revenue raised by the organization.

### **What will be the purpose of your organization?**

Will the Friends be:

- Primarily a source of active volunteers?
- Organizers of cultural and educational programs for the community, providing coordination of marketing and publicity, and supplying funds for presenters and supplies?
- Supplying funds for "extras" - new collections, services, or equipment not in the library's capital budget – through fund-raising efforts?
- Carrying out a public relations or advocacy strategy? (e.g., assisting with a budget vote to support the library)

### **Charitable Purpose**

Members of the public considering making a donation to the Friends may want to have a fuller explanation of the group's objectives. When you recruit board members and other volunteers, ask the community for book sale donations, reach out to potential donors for contributions, and publicize your activities, the purpose is fundamental to your "pitch." It needs to articulate to others outside the organization why the group was founded.

Some groups become incorporated (a first step on becoming a 501(c)(3) charity) and the incorporation papers must state the organization's purpose. As an independent fund-raising arm of the library, the organization's by-laws and articles of incorporation will be looked at by both state and federal agencies to determine if the group is truly a charitable entity. The IRS requires a statement of exempt purpose under the current IRS code to be included in these legal documents.

Here are some examples of statements of purpose in the Friend's by-laws (see page 4 for additional samples):

Friends of the Tompkins County Public Library **Purpose:** Article IX, Section 1: The Friends is organized and is to be operated exclusively for the purposes stated in the Charter, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

**Purpose of the Friends of the Webster Public Library (FWPL) (By-laws 2019):**  
The purposes and powers of the FWPL shall be to promote increased knowledge of the Webster Public Library by maintaining an association of persons interested in books and libraries and stimulating and promoting informed public interest in the Webster Public Library, its services, facilities and needs. The FWPL encourages donations to the library for library services and facilities for the community, sponsors and encourages volunteer service for FWPL activities, promotes cultural and related programs for the community, and promotes library needs to the community and elected officials.

A second step is to **write a clear mission statement for the Friends**. It is not necessary to use the language of the group's purpose from its incorporation papers to state its overarching mission. The organization's purpose is basic to the mission statement, but the **mission statement describes the methods, activities, and programs your organization will use to accomplish its goals**. The mission serves to define the organization's purpose clearly and succinctly to uninvolved parties: "here's why the Friends exist." The mission should be narrowly focused on the group's activities, but needs to be broad enough to allow for future growth and expansion as the organization matures. Because the mission is not part of the organization's by-laws, the members can choose to change its wording to best reflect the organization's activities.

A mission outlines **the means by which the group's purpose will be achieved and who will benefit from the group's activities**, i.e., the library itself, its patrons, the community at-large. The statement will become a touchstone when making decisions about the organization. "*Our mission is to promote literacy, encourage a love of books, and foster the use of library services*" is not quite enough. "*The Friends is a volunteer organization that advocates and promotes the library as a vital community service*"—but how will this happen?

Although it should be easy to express, the mission is not an advertising slogan. It needs to **highlight the most important roles of the group and what the volunteers hope to accomplish**. When you read the mission and compare it to anticipated activities, does it answer "Are we on track? Should we be headed in this direction?"

Here is a brief selection of mission statements that meet these criteria:

The mission of the **Friends of the Olean Public Library**: "The Friends of the Library is a nonprofit group of citizens who believe that an excellent library is essential to a community and who work to promote and assist the library."

The mission of the **Friends of the Clifton Park - Halfmoon Public Library** shall be to act as a bridge to the community by:

1. Increasing public awareness of, focusing attention on, and expanding the use of the Clifton Park - Halfmoon Public Library.
2. Initiating, organizing, promoting, and encouraging cultural and educational activities.
3. Stimulating gifts and endowments for the Clifton Park - Halfmoon Public Library, as well as raising funds to support certain library activities.

Founded in 1983, the **Friends of Cornwall Library** is a volunteer-driven, registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose goals are to:

- promote public awareness of Cornwall Public Library and its services
- raise funds for library initiatives
- contribute to the cultural enrichment of the local community

The mission of the **Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library** is to raise public and private funds, enhance marketing and public relations services, and provide timely and innovative programming to support the Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County and the Rochester Public Library.

The mission of the **Friends of the Tompkins County Public Library** is to support high-quality library resources for everyone in Tompkins County by

- Promoting reading by placing more books in more hands
- Raising funds through book sales and other activities
- Awarding grants to libraries and community organizations
- Advocating for library funding
- Encouraging volunteerism

Informational brochures about the Friends should include the mission statement. The content of the brochure should also reflect the group's purpose(s) (e.g., If the organization actively recruits volunteers to carry out tasks at the library, the brochure should have a checklist for ways a person can be involved, using the person's time and expertise to best advantage).

### **A resource to consult:**

**New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau** ([www.charitiesnys.com](http://www.charitiesnys.com))

State of New York, Department of Law, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway – 3rd Floor, New York, New York 10271. The Charities Bureau is responsible for supervising charitable organizations to protect donors and beneficiaries of those charities. The guide "**Procedures for Forming and Changing a New York Not-for-Profit Corporation**" is posted on [www.charitiesnys.com/guides\\_advice\\_new.jsp](http://www.charitiesnys.com/guides_advice_new.jsp) as a PDF. Under "Drafting a Certificate of Incorporation," see page 4 ff. concerning purposes defined in NYS Not-For-Profit Corporation Law (N-PCL) and page 10 about changing the organization's purpose.

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## **Additional Samples of Purpose Statements from By-Laws of Friends of the Library Groups in New York State**

### **Friends of the Seymour Public Library District (Auburn NY, 2013 by-laws)**

#### Article II. Statement of Purpose

The purposes for which the Friends have been formed are the following:

- a. To maintain an association of persons interested in books, libraries, and the promotion of lifelong literacy
- b. To focus public attention on Seymour Public Library District services, facilities, and needs, and enhance the community's appreciation for the library
- c. To stimulate gifts that may be used for collection development and other library needs
- d. To actively promote and support the financial and economic well-being of the Seymour Public Library District by the presentation of views before legislative and administrative hearings and before the public at large regarding any matter affecting the revenues of the library

### **Friends of the Avon Free Library (2013 by-laws)**

#### Article II (Purpose)

The purpose of the Friends shall be to maintain an organization of persons interested in libraries; to focus the public's attention on the Library; to stimulate the use of the Library's resources and services; to receive and encourage gifts to the Library; to support and cooperate with the Library in developing Library services and facilities for the community; to lend legislative support where needed; and to support the Freedom to Read as expressed in the American Library Association's Bill of Rights.

### **Kinderhook Memorial Library (2014 by-laws)**

#### Article II: Purpose

Sec.1 The purpose of the organization shall be to maintain an association of persons interested in the Kinderhook Memorial Library; to focus attention on resources and services of the library; to encourage gifts, endowments and bequests to the Library; to support and cooperate with the Library Board of Trustees and the Director in developing library services and facilities for the community; and to support the Freedom to Read as expressed in the American Library Association Bill of Rights.

### **Friends of the Walworth-Seely Public Library (2013 by-laws)**

#### Article 2.0 - Purpose

Section 2.01. The Corporation is organized and shall be operated exclusively for charitable purposes, in general, as set forth in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 as now in effect or hereafter amended, and, in particular to solicit and receive funds for the benefit of Walworth-Seely Public Library (the "Library"). To this end, the corporation shall:

- a) Receive gifts, memorials, and endowments for the sole benefit of the Walworth-Seely Public Library (the "Library").
- b) Develop and stimulate the Library's resources and services
- c) Encourage community support of the library
- d) Provide financial assistance through fund-raising efforts for obtaining materials and equipment to augment library services to the community
- e) Do any other act or thing incidental to or connected with the foregoing purposes or in advancement thereof, but not for the pecuniary profit or financial gain of its members, directors or officers, except as permitted under Article 5 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law.

No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall be devoted to carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation except in compliance with the Internal Revenue Code regarding lobbying by nonprofit organizations.

**Editorial note:** Item E leaves room for growth or change of the group's activities without changing the by-laws.