



Friends of Libraries Section

FLS creates a network to connect and inspire Friends groups in all types of libraries to support the New York library community.

A Primer on Friends Operating Agreements

The library's Board of Trustees, Friends officers and volunteers, and library administrators have relationships that are very closely intertwined. Cooperation among these entities is critically important to the success of Friends and the library itself. But it must also be recognized that the responsibilities of the Trustees, Friends, and library administrators are truly separate and have different levels of authority.

How will the Friends be "on the same page" concerning the library's goals and direction for services and programs for the community? **A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a written agreement that specifies the principles and guidelines under which the various parties seek to clarify and formalize their respective roles, responsibilities, and general arrangements for working together.** The MOU is a statement of commitments from each organization and an allocation of responsibilities. The library and the Friends should assess their mutual goals, taking into account the missions of both of these distinct groups.

United for Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, strongly recommends that libraries and their Friends groups develop a MOU so that "as the players change, the commitment from the library and the Friends stays stable." (Fact Sheet #26, Library Support for Friends Activities.) An MOU can provide a roadmap to help the organizations to proceed, especially when there is new leadership in either the library's Board of Trustees or the Friends. This well-crafted agreement should be jointly developed by the library board, library director, and representatives from the Friends. Its purpose is to put in writing the respective roles, responsibilities, and fiscal relationship between the library and the Friends. The MOU should be reviewed annually but can be in effect for several years. When the parties change (e.g., Friends Chair, library director), it would be wise to sign a new agreement. Some libraries determine to have the document reviewed by an attorney, but that is not a requirement to have a successful agreement.

Here are some points that each MOU should definitely include:

1. An introductory section naming the parties in the agreement, with the full name of the library and the official name of the Friends organization, along with the business (mailing) address of the library, city, and state.
2. A statement that the Friends are independent and not part of the library.
3. How the library administration will include the Friends in the library's planning process.
4. A plan for routine, informed communications through ex officio appointments of liaisons between the two boards (e.g., Trustee Liaison to the Friends Board, Staff Liaison to the Friends, Friends Liaison to the Board of Trustees). *These liaisons do not vote on business before either board.*
5. A broad statement on how funds raised on behalf of the library will be distributed.
6. An agreement that the Friends will publicly support library policies and advocate on behalf of the library.
7. Who will have the final say on accepting or declining gifts to the library.
8. A statement on a succession plan for the Friends organization if the current volunteers resign and the group becomes inactive.
9. Signature and date lines for the President of the library's Board of Trustees and the Friends President. The parties sign on behalf of their entire individual boards.

The Memorandum of Understanding may also include:

1. The mission statements of both the library and the Friends of the Library delineating the distinct purpose of each group.
2. What types of support the library will provide the Friends (e.g., work and storage space, website hosting and maintenance, staff assistance).
3. That a discussion of mutual concerns will be held annually to review how the Friends resources (volunteer and financial) might support the library's strategic initiatives.
4. Assurance that the Friends will take the steps necessary to maintain their nonprofit status by complying with all directives from the IRS for 501(c)(3) organizations.

Sample Memorandum of Understanding

The following constitutes a cooperation agreement between the Friends of the Anytown Public Library and the Anytown Public Library, LIBRARY'S MAILING ADDRESS, STATE. This arrangement shall be binding for three years following the date of signatures below, unless it is modified by mutual agreement of the Friends Executive Council (hereafter referred to as "the Friends") and the Anytown library administration (referred to as "the library").

The mission of the Friends of the Anytown Public Library is to raise money and public awareness in the community to support the services and programs of the Library. As a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, however, it is a legally separate, independent entity and is not a part of the Library. The Staff Liaison to the Friends (the library director or a staff appointee) is an ex officio position; serving in an advisory capacity on projects that benefit the library.

The Library agrees to:

1. Include the Friends in the long-range planning process to ensure that the Friends are aware of the goals and direction of the library.
2. Share with the Friends the library's strategic initiatives at the beginning of each fiscal year and discuss with the Friends how the organization's volunteer and financial resources might help advance these projects.
3. Furnish the Friends with a wish list each year that indicates the Library's anticipated needs for Friends support.
4. Provide the Friends with staff support to assist them with the development of a newsletter, Friends promotional materials to market the organization, mass mailings, and meeting coordination.
5. Provide public space for Friends membership brochures and promotional materials.
6. Make adequate space available in the library for the volunteers to carry out their work, including sorting and storage of book sale donations.

The Friends agree:

1. To publicly support the Library and its policies.
2. To discuss and vote on items requested by the library on its wish list and supply funding for agreed upon expenditures in a timely manner.
3. That, apart from the group's administrative expenses, any and all monies raised will be spent to enhance library programs, services, and other Library-defined needs unless otherwise agreed to by both the Friends and the Library.
4. That the Library administration has the final say in accepting or declining any and all gifts made to the Library.
5. To engage in advocacy efforts on behalf of the Library under the guidance of the Library administration and the Library's Board of Trustees.
6. That if the current officers and other operational volunteers cease to actively raise funds and promote the Library, the Friends Executive Council will resign, allowing for new administrative volunteers to lead the organization according to the group's current by-laws.

FILL IN NAME, President, Friends of the Anytown Public Library

Date: _____

(signature of Friends President)

FILL IN NAME, President, Board of Trustees of the Anytown Public Library

Date: _____

(signature of President, Library Board)

Primer and sample Memorandum of Understanding written by Lisa C. Wemett, Friends of Libraries Section, New York Library Association. **All rights reserved in its entirety.** Contact FLS/NYLA at: FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com. Additional resource: "What's So Scary About a Memorandum of Understanding?" *Empire Friends: News and Notes* (issue no. 57, Fall 2014, p.5-6). www.nyla.org/friends > Publications.