



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.

www.NYLA.org/Friends

Toolkit to Start a Friends of the Library Group

A toolkit developed by the Friends of Libraries Section of the New York Library Association

Throughout this toolkit, resources and handouts have links attached that take you directly to the documents, minutes, and webinars. Most are posted on the FLS webpage.

FLS Webinars: NYLA members can watch previous FLS webinars in the [NYLA webinar archive](#) at any time, **free of charge**, by logging into the NYLA Online Membership Center with their assigned username and password (received with membership confirmations/receipts). You can also head to www.nyla.org/friends > Events > FLS Webinars. **Handouts are also posted.** Most webinars run about one hour. If you do not have time to watch the full recording, you can review the slides.

Ask the Lawyer: NYS's regional library councils have developed a partnership that retains an attorney, Stephanie Adams, Esq., to offer their member libraries timely input on legal issues that can impact library operations and to provide general guidance, offering an opinion for decision-making purposes. Friends of the Library groups that support libraries who are members of their regional library council may work with their library's director to submit a question. Once reviewed by the library council's director, the questions are submitted to the "Ask the Lawyer" service which is provided at no cost to the council's member libraries.

The attorney's answers become part of the "Recently Asked Questions" portion of the WNYLRC website, (<https://wnylrc.org/services/askservices/raqs>). **This toolkit references numerous answers that pertain to Friends activities and decision-making.** Use the search function of the database to see answers already posted (keyword Friends). Recent answers covered organizations holding back funds raised for the library, operating agreements, and cash handling by library employees for Friends fundraising events.

Introduction

What is a Friends of the Library group?

A Friends of the Library group is a community-based support group whose aim is to further the goals of the library in the community. Successful, effective Friends organizations work closely with the library's Board of Trustees and staff but are independent organizations. These community volunteers believe in the library's mission and are primarily concerned with developing a Friends group to assist with advancing the library, its plans, and priorities.

What are the benefits to the library of having a Friends of the Library group?

Friends of the Library groups are usually active in raising funds, volunteering in the library, or advocating for it. These activities often result in an enhancement of the library's image in the community. The Friends underwriting of "extras" outside the scope of the library's operating

budget may lead to the development of additional or expanded library collections, programs, and services.

Audience for this toolkit

Library directors or managers; members of the library's Board of Trustees; community civic leaders and volunteers who would like to establish a volunteer support organization for their library.

Scope of this Toolkit

Included here are links to the resources used in the FLS workshop, "Getting Started: Creating and Supporting a Friends Group for Your Library." Additional materials have been developed for FLS professional development offerings (i.e., webinars, presentations at the NYLA Annual Conference) or in conjunction with FLS research projects (e.g., "[Resources for Friends Groups Supporting Small and Rural Libraries](#).") The bulk of these materials are posted on the FLS webpage: www.nyla.org/friends.

Decision Making

The Ten Commandments of a Successful Friends Group (Source: Dolnick, Sandy, ed. *Friends of Libraries Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. American Library Association, 1996. p. 29). *This handout is proprietary to "Getting Started" and is only distributed to workshop participants. It is not found elsewhere on the FLS webpage.* First and foremost, the director or manager of the library must be in favor of establishing a Friends group.

Getting Started: Be Informed!

[Where Can I Learn More About Friends Groups: Resources about Friends of Libraries](#)

(original content and annotations by Lisa C. Wemett)

On the FLS webpage, see "[Resources for Friends Groups Supporting Small and Rural Libraries](#)." The resource page is the culmination of an FLS project undertaken over two years to learn more about volunteers who support under-resourced libraries and how FLS could better meet the needs of its members. This resource is Appendix A of the article, "**Getting Started: Creating and Sustaining a Friends Group for Your Library**" by Lisa C. Wemett (see Selected Resources below for full citation).

Development of a Steering Committee and Volunteer Recruitment

[Guidelines for Volunteer Programs Coordinated by the Friends of the Library](#)

Touches on volunteer applications, policies and procedures, supervision, volunteer job descriptions, interviews, placement letters, training, accountability, codes of conduct, and volunteer recognition. These guidelines were endorsed by the Friends of Libraries Section's Executive Board, May 10, 2022.

General Administration Planning and Organizing a Friends of the Library group

A new Friends organization needs to lay a firm foundation, establishing their purpose and a mission statement. Decisions need to be made about organizational structure, whether you call it the Friends Board, the Friends Council, or something entirely different. The governance of the group is outlined in their by-laws, supported by a conflict of interest policy.

[The Purpose and Mission of Friends of the Library Organizations](#)

Includes samples of purpose statements from the by-laws of Friends of the Library groups in New York State.

[Annotated By-laws: what should be included in by-laws for Friends organizations?](#)

This resource is Appendix B of the article, “**Getting Started: Creating and Sustaining a Friends Group for Your Library**” by Lisa C. Wemett (see Selected Resources below for full citation).

[Conflict of Interest Policy for Friends of the Library Organizations in NYS](#)

Includes a sample of the appendix of the organization’s by-laws which should address this policy plus a one-page annual statement of review of the conflict of interest policy to be signed by the directors and officers of the organization.

Organizing Documents and Incorporation

A Friends of the Library group may not apply for federal tax-exempt status unless first incorporated as a nonprofit in NYS. Incorporation certifies the group may conduct business as an independent legal entity. Incorporation provides the necessary requirements to establish bank accounts, acquire sales tax exemptions, and nonprofit mailing permits from the U.S. Postal Service, among other rights. Incorporation also limits the personal liability of its individual members and officers, a risk that unincorporated organizations take.

Determine your group’s legal name. Check that the name you choose has not been registered in the past by searching the Corporation and Business Entity Database maintained by the Department of State’s Division of Corporations: <https://apps.dos.ny.gov/publicinquiry/>.

Call NYS Education Department to check that a particular Friends group has not been previously incorporated and for up-to-date instructions on applying for a consent for the name: (518) 473-8296. (There is a fee.) This step would also confirm if the library had created a Friends of the Library group previously.

The certificate of incorporation must include the **name of the corporation** and a **statement of purpose** that clearly affirms the group’s charitable focus. The location of the **corporation’s office** should be the **library’s mailing address** to ensure consistency over time (rather than the founding president’s home address).

See NYS Charities Bureau booklet: “*Procedures for Forming and Changing a New York Not-for-Profit Corporation*” (PDF is posted at <https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/forming-changing-notforprofit.pdf>.)

Fishman, Stephen, J.D. "[How to Form a New York Nonprofit Corporation.](https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/forming-nonprofit-corporation-new-york-36079.html)"
<https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/forming-nonprofit-corporation-new-york-36079.html>
Outlines the basics of forming a nonprofit corporation under New York State's Not-For-Profit Corporation Law, a first step to create a 501(c)(3).

New York State Dept. of State, Division of Corporations, State Records, and Uniform Commercial Code, "[Not-for-Profit Incorporation Instructions.](https://dos.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2018/12/1511-inst.pdf)" (Dec. 2018).
<https://dos.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2018/12/1511-inst.pdf>

It is advisable to keep copies of all documents submitted to the various agencies and copies of emails until the process is completed.

Adams, Stephanie, Esq. "Finding a Lawyer." Western NY Regional Library Council's Ask the Lawyer Service. Posted October 29, 2018. <https://wnylrc.org/raq/finding-lawyer>

Structure and Governance – Communications

[Keepin' It Friendly! Communications Tips for Library Staff, Trustees, and Friends of the Library](#)

[Working Together: Roles and Responsibilities Guidelines](#) (NYS) – Details the specific responsibilities of the library director, the Board of Trustees, and the Friends of the Library. Source: *Handbook for Library Trustees of New York State*. 2018 edition. Available for free download. <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/trustees/handbook/index.html>.

Agenda for First Public Meeting of the Friends of the Library:

- welcoming remarks
- explanation of mission and purpose of the Friends
- formal resolution to establish the Friends, approving the articles of incorporation
- adoption of by-laws/constitution by vote of those assembled
- election of officers
- volunteer sign-up
- entertainment followed by a reception for new officers: celebrate!

original source: *Handbook for Connecticut Library Friends*, August 2006 ed. – no longer available

Memorandum of Understanding, a.k.a. Operating Agreements

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), also referred to as an operating agreement, lays out the expectations and processes that will guide the relationship between the library and the Friends.

[A Primer on Friends Operating Agreements](#)

Two responses from "Ask the Lawyer" which are very pertinent to effective operating agreements and procedures to mitigate disagreements between all parties:

- [Friends and Library Cooperation Agreement](https://wnylrc.org/raq/friends-and-library-cooperation-agreement) (September 30, 2020)
- [Friends of the Library not being friendly](https://wnylrc.org/raq/friends-library-not-being-friendly) (January 30, 2020)

Applying for 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Status; Small Nonprofits; Registering with the Charities Bureau

A nonprofit is required to formally apply to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for recognition of tax-exempt status, known as 501(c)(3). The Friends would file Form 1023 or Form 1023-EZ (the application for tax-exempt status) and, if successful, receive a **determination letter** from the IRS confirming that it is a nonprofit organization. At that point, the Friends can state to donors that their contributions to the organization are tax-deductible for the donor.

The IRS provides help with the nonprofit application process step-by-step and a checklist on your group's eligibility to apply: <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/application-process>. Links include the required provisions in your organizing documents plus samples and state law requirements for by-laws. See also information on Power of Attorney and User Fees. Consult these IRS publications:

[Publication 4220](#): *Applying for 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Status*

[Publication 557](#): *Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization*

Exemption Application Form 1023-EZ: *Application for Recognition of Exemption*

As of January 2018, an organization may apply online with this streamlined form if their annual gross receipts are less than \$50,000. For receipts greater than \$50,000, Form 1023 is used. There is a fee based on assets/income. The signed and approved certificate of incorporation must be attached to this application.

However, if the Friends do not expect to have revenue exceeding \$5,000 in any given year, there is another avenue to tax-exempt status without the costly application to the IRS.

When Courtney Darts, Esq., of the Pro Bono Partnership in White Plains presented a webinar sponsored by FLS/NYLA in 2018, [Best Practices for Management of Friends Boards](#), she outlined how a small nonprofit might not need to apply to the IRS with Form 1023:

“Very small nonprofits – those with annual revenues of less than \$5,000 – may be considered automatically tax-exempt if they are formed for purposes that would satisfy the requirements under Section 501(c)(3). See <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/organizations-not-required-to-file-form-1023> Because these organizations are not required to file Form 1023, they will not have a determination letter confirming their (c)(3) status, but they still may be considered exempt under 501(c)(3).

However, it's very important to note that these small groups must be filing a Form 990 every year to maintain their tax-exempt status. The 990 filing requirement applies even if the organization was not required to file the Form 1023 application.

I mention this because it is possible that a small Friends group might never have applied for tax-exempt status, but could be functioning as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) if it was formed for (c)(3) purposes, has never had revenues of more than \$5,000 per year, and has met the Form 990 filing requirement every year. If you think this might apply to your organization, I encourage you to consult an accountant or lawyer for specific advice to confirm your organization's status and the deductibility of contributions made to your organization."

If the nonprofit status is achieved this way, the only effort is to file the 990-EZ electronically each year. If they miss submitting the 990 for three years running, a group can lose their nonprofit status.

Raising funds comes with detailed record-keeping and government oversight. Friends leaders need to be aware of charitable organization filing requirements, especially if the Friends raise more than \$25,000 annually. Review this resource written by Stephanie Adams Esq. about registering your group with the **NYS Charities Bureau** (posted 7/3/2023)
<https://wnylrc.org/raq/charitable-organization-filing-requirements-small-under-50k-friends>

Growing Membership, Membership-Raising, and Membership Recruitment

Membership is a combination of efforts: volunteer engagement; incentives to join and perks for Friends supporters; recruitment of volunteers to actively support the group; and volunteer recognition and donor relations. It is also pivotal as a source of ongoing revenue for operating costs.

FLS Commitment to Diversity – [Representation matters](#). People are more likely to get involved in an organization where they can see themselves. It is vital to the ongoing viability of Friends groups to recruit diverse members who can share their experience and expertise with their community's library.

Asset mapping is a way to assess the strengths of your organization and the community at large – all of the skills, talent, expertise, and creativity that already exists. This [worksheet](#) will help your members to identify resources available in your community. Discussing this topic with your Friends group will spark ideas on how to partner with individuals and groups that can bring a great deal to your organization.

Everyone needs Friends!

A sample flier is used to collect information from library patrons and community members who might be interested in supporting a Friends group, either financially or as active volunteers. Build an email list to keep interested folks up to date on your progress and appoint a volunteer coordinator to contact potential active members to assist the group.

Membership-Raising: Tips about Memberships for Friends Organizations

Benefits to Friends membership can be anything from a "members only" book sale preview event to discounts on book bags or photocopying. Answer "What's in it for me?" (WIIFM). This resource is Appendix C of the article, "**Getting Started: Creating and Sustaining a**

Friends Group for Your Library” by Lisa C. Wemett (see Selected Resources below for full citation).

[A Dozen Tips for Membership-Raising for Friends Groups Supporting Rural and Small Libraries](#) by Lisa C. Wemett, FLS Coordinator for Professional Development

Sample membership forms:

- [Friends of the Fairport Public Library](#)
- [Friends of Onondaga Free Library](#)

Volunteer and Leadership Development, Retention, and Succession Planning

Being prepared reflects your commitment to the organization for the long term. Help your group be ready for the inevitable: volunteers come and go. Set up good recruitment practices and onboarding with orientations to the various tasks. Provide potential volunteers with job descriptions so they are aware of your expectations.

Please note: While they are welcome to be supportive members of the Friends, neither a current member of the Board of Trustees of the library which will be supported by the Friends nor staff members employed by the library are eligible to serve on the Friends Board. This is a conflict of interest. Former trustees or retired staff members can be encouraged to volunteer in any capacity.

On the “[Resources for Friends Groups Supporting Small and Rural Libraries](#)” page, under **Leadership**, see the following documents which can be personalized to your group’s needs:

- Job Description Template
- Sample Volunteer Job Description: Book Sale Sorter and Assistant
- Sample Annual Transition Statement

[Planning for Smooth Transitions: Tips for Friends Preparing for Leadership Succession](#)

Volunteer/Member Engagement; Marketing & Promotion; Community Relations; Partnerships; Networking

It’s not all about book sales. Staffing a table at a community event, creating a float for a local parade, or soliciting gift certificates from area businesses for raffle baskets promotes the library and its services as well as building community awareness of the Friends. Through carefully planned and thoughtful networking, Friends can build effective working relationships with local community groups alongside library staff members.

Webinar: [Friendly Partnerships Strengthen Communities](#). Children’s librarian Jason Poole’s summer “BookBox for Kids and Teens” initiative brings books to readers unable to visit the Webster Public Library. Helen Rados, member of the Friends of Ethelbert B. Crawford Public Library, along with youth services librarian Cheryl Shelton Jones have increased public

awareness of the library, engaged volunteers, and increased Friends memberships through their networking.

FLS Connections! These free virtual opportunities allow volunteers and staff to talk about topics important to Friends organizations. The sessions are not recorded or archived, but pertinent handouts and minutes of the gatherings are posted. The following sessions apply to volunteer engagement, community relations, and partnerships:

Community Outreach Supported by Friends - Amy Discenza, MLIS, Outreach Coordinator, Extension/Outreach Dept., Monroe County Library System (September 15, 2022)

Reaching Friends with Email and E-Newsletters - Tony Iovino, Assistant Director, Oceanside (NY) Library (March 9, 2023). Slide deck included [here](#).

Fundraising, Advocacy, Programming, and More

Fundraising for Friends Groups Supporting Rural and Small Libraries by Vincent Sperrazza, Member, FLS Task Force on Friends and Rural Libraries and Member At Large, NYLA's Rural Libraries Roundtable (June 2022). This resource is valuable to Friends groups of all sizes.

Guidelines for Expenditures of Funds Raised by the Friends of the Idyllic Free Library

Book Sales: Donations and Remainders

Trivia, Literati, and Wildly Successful Community Fundraising - At the 2022 NYLA Annual Conference, Kerry A. Barnes, Executive Director of the Tompkins County Public Library Foundation, presented some of her organization's tried and true fundraisers that did not involve a book sale, including their long-running Readathon. Read more at www.NYLA.org/Friends > Events > FLS Programs at the NYLA Annual Conference > 2022 for links to [Kerry's slide program](#). In this part of the FLS webpage, see materials from other annual conferences where FLS regularly features panel discussions on fundraising beyond book sales.

Two additional responses from "Ask the Lawyer" which are very pertinent to fundraising and collecting donations in partnership with other organizations:

- [Handling Funds for Friends of the Library](#) (July 5, 2023)
- [Policy for Collecting Donations](#) (July 24, 2023)

Advocacy Tips for Friends Groups Supporting Rural and Small Libraries by Carole Kupelian, Member, FLS Task Force on Friends and Rural Libraries

Learn about current legislative initiatives on the New York Library Association's webpage, www.nyla.org/advocacy. Encourage your key volunteers and Friends members to sign up to become a "Library Champion." By simply providing your contact information, you will automatically receive Library Advocacy Action Alerts via email. Keep up to date on NYLA's ongoing advocacy efforts and learn about this year's legislative priorities. NYLA's advocacy

tools are easy to use. You can make a huge difference by responding to alerts and sending emails to your representatives in less than three minutes—so quick and easy!

Lindell, Karen. “9 Places You Can Apply to for Program Funds,” published on Programming Librarian, March 2023 (<https://programminglibrarian.org>).

Fishing for Friends: How to Reel in Midlife Adults with Programs

This webinar presented by FLS in April 2022 examines the considerations when planning, marketing, and implementing adult programs that will engage adults 50+ with the library and the Friends. Highlights examples of outreach, diverse formal and informal lifelong learning opportunities, and creative community collaborations that can be replicated in your community. Speaker: Dr. Reneé K. Bennett-Kapusniak, author of *Public Library Programs and Services for Midlife and Beyond: Expanding Opportunities for a Growing Population* (Libraries Unlimited. 2018)

Conclusion: Some Suggestions for Success

1. Include a section on your Friends membership form listing volunteer opportunities where members can indicate how they would like to help.
2. Be sure to follow up with a telephone call to each and every person who volunteers. (It's easy to skip an email.)
3. Regularly thank your volunteers. Honor volunteers during National Friends of Libraries Week in October, at the Friends annual meeting, or other special occasions at the library.
4. Keep track of volunteer hours for annual reports and grant applications.

The Friends of Libraries Section's Executive Board wishes you success as you establish your Friends group!

Selected Resources, from most recent to older
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Handbook for Connecticut Library Friends (April 2022) published online by the **Friends of Connecticut Libraries** (FOCL) (<http://foclib.org>)

Wemett, Lisa C. “Getting Started: Creating and Sustaining a Friends Group for Your Library.” [JLAMS, Spring 2016](#) (vol. 12, no. 1): 23-59.

Is your library considering organizing community volunteers to support its programs and services? Initial work requires following a variety of steps: recruiting a steering committee, determining the Friends' purposes and mission, developing by-laws, and holding a public meeting to found the Friends. Once established, expanding the group's membership and implementing steps to grow the group's leadership over time will serve to sustain an active organization.

Tool Kit for Building a Library Friends Group (circa 2016; updated April 2019). Prepared by Martha Moore Gill and Donald B. Reynolds, Jr. for the Friends of Tennessee Libraries, 4109 Forest Glen Drive Knoxville, Tennessee 37919.

Reed, Sally Gardner. **Libraries Need Friends: A Toolkit to Create Friends Groups or to Revitalize the One You Have.** United for Libraries, 2012. 20 pgs.

Download under “United for Libraries Resources for Friends Groups” at <https://www.ala.org/united/sites/ala.org/united/files/content/friends/orgtools/libraries-need-friends.pdf>. A concise article on the basics, from the decision to establish a Friends group through membership recruitment. See Appendix B for a sample operating agreement (Memorandum of Understanding).

<p style="text-align: center;">Additional Resources from the Friends of Libraries Section of the New York Library Association</p>
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Website: www.nyla.org/friends

Check here for current program offerings at the NYLA Annual Conference and archived FLS-sponsored presentations and handouts. Locate information on joining FLS, the Section’s current officers, election information, job descriptions, procedural documents, and applications for awards. Under “**Publications**” see the archives of the current and past FLS newsletters, “**Friends News and Notes**,” with itemized content lists for every issue. This annotation just scratches the surface of the myriad resources you will find here to help your group!

Join us! Membership in FLS

Library civic leaders involved in their local Friends of the Library group are encouraged to join the members of the Friends of Library Section (FLS) of the New York Library Association (NYLA). Membership information is available online at www.nyla.org/join.

Training: Workshops, Webinars, and Conferences

FLS has offered the services of a cadre of trainers since 2015. The trainers are FLS leaders with backgrounds in volunteer services and Friends of the Library organizations. See the FLS webpage for the document “[Considering hosting an FLS Workshop at your location?](#)” for further details.

Educational sessions which include webinars and in-person sessions at the NYLA Annual Conference provide panel discussions and presentations by experts on a wide variety of topics that help Friends leaders in their professional development. See www.nyla.org/conference for details on the current year’s conference sessions.

Discussion Listserv and Networking Opportunities

FLS members may choose to participate in the FLS listserv to pose questions to their peers and to publicize upcoming events sponsored by their Friends group.

FLS offers networking opportunities throughout the year. In-person meet-ups and virtual gatherings entitled “FLS Connections!” provide opportunities to discuss issues with Friends colleagues in an informal atmosphere. On the FLS webpage, select Events and then “FLS Connections! Previous Minutes and Resources.”

Other toolkits in the FLS/NYLA Friends Toolbox:

- Toolkit for Friends Councils (in development 7/2023)
- FLS Toolkit for Writing Grant Proposals (in development 11/2023)

For more information or assistance, contact FLS/NYLA anytime at FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com.

This information has not been reviewed by an attorney, does not consist of legal advice, and must not be relied upon as an alternative to legal advice. Ask a local attorney knowledgeable in nonprofit law to review your by-laws and incorporation papers.

Always be certain to check for any recent changes or updates in the tax law which might affect the accuracy of this information, which was prepared 9/18/23.

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