Purpose and Mission
for Friends Groups Supporting Rural and Small Libraries
by Karen Sperrazza, FLS Past President 2022

Friends groups have three basic purposes or functions. First, Friends provide financial support to help provide extras for their library. A member of the Friends may make a monetary donation, pay annual dues, or provide goods or materials for the library. Second, Friends are a volunteer force for whatever needs to be accomplished for their library using their time and talents. Third, members of the Friends are encouraged to advocate for the library, speaking for and acting on behalf of the library, putting the library in a favorable light in the community or at the state level. Almost everything Friends do is advocacy.

Financial Support
- Make an annual donation to the library or pay membership dues, which should be structured for various levels of giving
- Vote to support Friends expenditures to underwrite materials and services for the library (e.g., programs, subscriptions, refreshments, etc.)
- Volunteer at fundraising events and contribute at a level comfortable for you

Volunteer
- Be present at the library
- Help to organize and carry out preparations for programs
- Do what needs to be done
- Whatever your talent might be, use it to benefit the library

Advocate
- Support library budget votes
- Speak to elected officials
- Speak to representatives in Albany

Friends are independent organizations with their own governing structure, officers, and by-laws. Some groups may choose to apply to the Internal Revenue Service for 501(c)(3) status. An association library may have the Friends organization as a committee of the library’s Board of Trustees. Whatever the structure, the Friends leadership should have a liaison from the Friends who attends Board meetings in an ex officio (nonvoting) capacity.
Based upon a review of the library’s mission statement and the library’s Strategic or Long-Range Plan, the Friends can formulate their purpose(s) and clearly articulate their desire to support the library.

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 the Friends, the library trustees, and the library administration. It is also an allocation of responsibilities. The library and the Friends should assess their mutual goals, taking into account the missions of both of these two distinct groups.

Depending on the mission of the library, the mission of the Friends may encompass more than direct financial support for their library. For example, if the library supports literacy programs within the school district or other broader literacy programs, the Friends may opt to support these literacy initiatives in their community as well, if this effort falls under their stated purpose.

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).

Once logged in, follow these prompts: Career Resources > Continuing Education. Select the heading “NYLA Webinars” and scroll to NYLA’s Webinarary. Select the webinar you want to view. 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.

Past webinar offerings addressing organizational topics:
- Best Practices for Management of Friends Boards
- Effective Efficient Boards and Board Meetings
- Before Friends Become Frienemies

See these FLS Handouts posted on www.nyla.org/friends > Resources for Friends Groups Supporting Small and Rural Libraries > Purpose and Mission:
- A Primer on Friends Operating Agreements
- The Purpose and Mission of Friends of the Library Organizations
Examples of both purpose and mission statements for various Friends of the Library groups in New York State can be found in this handout.
**FLS Friends News and Notes:** Past FLS newsletters have featured articles on the purposes and missions of Friends organizations that can provide some guidance and suggestions. Check out these articles on the FLS webpage, [www.nyla.org/friends](http://www.nyla.org/friends) under Publications.

- “Right from the Start” (carrying out the Friends charitable purpose and obligations of compliance) – December 2021, p. 5
- Focus on Friends Finale: Partnerships – May/June 2021, p. 5
- “A Message from FLS President Karen Sperrazza” (purpose of Friends and advocacy role) – May/June 2021, p. 3
- Strong Advocacy, Stronger Fundraising (President’s Message) – March 2019, p. 2

**United for Libraries: Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations**, a division of the American Library Association, offers many organizational tips on their website, [www.ala.org/united](http://www.ala.org/united). Visit **Organizational Tools for Friends Groups** at [https://www.ala.org/united/friends/orgtools](https://www.ala.org/united/friends/orgtools). Here you will find information on bylaws, mission statements, understanding roles, and sample policies. *(When developing by-laws and other policies, FLS advises groups to use examples from Friends organizations in New York State as models, since NYS law may be entirely different than other states’ regulations.)* Some of the information is available by simply visiting the website and some content is only available to members who log-in.

FLS/NYLA is a member of United for Libraries. Contact [FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com](mailto:FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com) if you would like our assistance to research a topic on behalf of your group.

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