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 then 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 needs of the library and the community and may change over time, reflecting the interests of the active members once the group is established. The purpose serves to guide the group’s future decisions on its work agenda, its plan of service, and how to best utilize the revenue raised by the organization to support the library.

In supporting the library, what is the purpose of your organization?

Will the Friends:

▪ Primarily be a source of active volunteers?
▪ Organize cultural and educational programs for the community, providing coordination of marketing and publicity, and supplying funds for presenters and supplies?
▪ Raise and supply funds for “extras” such as new collections, services, or equipment not in the library’s capital budget?
▪ Carry out a public relations or advocacy strategy? (e.g., assisting with a budget vote to support the library)

The organization’s values most likely will include advancement of the library, influencing elected officials and donors, recognizing the core values of the community by the programs and services the library is able to provide, securing financial stability for the library both annually and into the future, and collaborating with other organizations whose interests intersect with the Friends of the Library.

Potential donors, volunteers, and community members considering joining the Friends may want to have a fuller explanation of the group’s objectives and charitable purpose. When you recruit volunteers for leadership roles, ask the community for book sale donations, reach out for contributions, and publicize your activities, the purpose is fundamental to your “pitch.” It needs to express to others outside the organization why the group was founded.

Articulating your purpose will help recruit the people with the talents you need most. Informational brochures about the Friends should reflect the group’s core purpose(s) and mission. 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 their expertise, skills, and time to best advantage.

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
fundraising 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):

**The Friends of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District (2018 by-laws)**

Article II. Purposes. The purposes for which the corporation is formed are as follows:

a. To provide an association for persons interested in the Poughkeepsie Public Library District; to build a greater realization of the importance of the library as an informational and cultural force in the community; to develop a thorough understanding of the library’s responsibilities, limitations, and difficulties; to make the public aware of the library’s facilities and to stimulate use of the library’s services and resources; to encourage support of the library through gifts and volunteer services.

b. To solicit funds for the benefit of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District.

**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.

**Mission Statement**

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 over-arching 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 generally is not part of the organization’s by-laws, the members can choose to change its wording to best reflect the organization’s activities.

Here is a sample to show the difference between an organization’s purpose and its mission:

The **purpose** of the Friends of Libraries Section stated in the by-laws is:

A. To promote cooperative efforts and the exchange of information among individuals active in community Friends groups and others interested in library service in New York State.

B. To encourage the establishment of Friends groups throughout New York State and to assist in their formation.

C. To present programs at the NYLA Annual Conference that pertain to and enhance the mission of this Section.

D. To provide leadership and assistance in advocacy for libraries, library Friends, and library users throughout New York State.

The **mission statement** of FLS/NYLA is: “FLS creates a network to connect and inspire Friends groups in all types of libraries to support the New York library community.”
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 the questions “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.

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

A resource to consult:
New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau (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 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.
Additional Samples of Purpose Statements
from By-Laws of Friends of the Library Groups in New York State

Sand Lake Town Library Friends (2020 by-laws)
Article II. Mission and Purpose
The Mission of the Friends is to support the Sand Lake Town Library. It shall be a nonprofit, non-sectarian, and non-political organization.

The purpose of the Friends is to support the library’s mission, in close coordination with the Library Director and the Library Board of Trustees, through the following activities:
- Provide direct additional financial assistance for needs not normally in the operating budget;
- Increase connections to the community that enhance library services;
- Provide volunteer services to the library;
- Assist the library with special projects as needed;
- Support cultural and educational programs for the community; and
- Provide advocacy and visibility for the library in the community

Friends of the Victor Farmington Library Inc. (2017 by-laws)
Article II – Purpose. Section 1.
The purposes of the Friends of the Victor Farmington Library, Inc. shall be to enhance the community’s awareness and support of the library’s programs and services; to encourage gifts, memorials, and endowments to the library; to sponsor occasional programs or activities not typically carried out by the library but which are in keeping with the library’s philosophy and objectives; and to provide financial assistance in obtaining materials and equipment that will augment the library’s service to the community. The Friends shall be a non-policymaking and nonprofit organization.

Friends of Red Jacket Community Library, Inc. (2016 by-laws)
Article II. Purpose.
The purpose of this organization will be to provide the library with financial support and to advocate for the library in the community.

Friends of the Chili Public Library, Inc. (2016 by-laws)
Article II. Purpose
The purpose of the organization shall be to maintain an association of persons interested in books and libraries; to focus public attention on the Chili Public Library, its services, facilities, and needs; to stimulate the use of the Chili Public Library's resources and services; to encourage gifts, endowments, and bequests to the Chili Public Library; to support and cooperate with the library staff and Board of Trustees of the Chili Public Library in developing and producing resources that will aid in the fulfillment of these objectives, and to solicit and receive grants and contributions for any of the foregoing purposes.

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file: purpose and mission Friends 2022