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

Friends Can Be Excellent Advocates: Members of Friends groups are often the library’s biggest advocates. Much of their advocacy is done via “word of mouth” and invitations sent to the community to attend library programs, some co-sponsored by the Friends.

Friends organizations may advocate via their newsletters and place news items in local newspapers. Those groups that have funds may also underwrite advertising in the local media, including newspapers, radio, or television. Friends can also publicize events and new acquisitions or library services via social media.

Funding: Funding for libraries comes from many sources. Along with funds raised locally, funds from the county, state, and national governments are used to support library programs, services, and facilities.

Advocate for all NYS Libraries: Friends group members should be included in state and national advocacy events along with staff from their library, trustees, or other members of a library system. Often, there are appointments set up to talk with legislators at their local offices as well as entire days of appointments in Albany or Washington.

While preparing to attend a meeting with an elected official, consider the goals of the visit. One place to learn about current legislative initiatives is the New York Library Association’s webpage, www.nyla.org/advocacy.

Sign up to be 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!

Library systems have also coordinated virtual office visits with individual legislators or their office staff. NYLA’s Online Advocacy Center has a toolkit to help you be the best social media advocate you can be. If you cannot join an in-person or a virtual visit with your elected officials, learn how to utilize Twitter to reach your officials with messages
about important pieces of legislation by reviewing NYLA’s “Tweeting Tips and Tricks Cheat Sheet.”

In preparing for a meeting with a legislator or other elected official, here are some things to consider:

- **Thank You to the Legislator:**
  - Do you know of something he/she has done specifically for your library or libraries in general?

- **Share:**
  - Why are you a member of the Friends of the Library?
  - What is unique about your library?
  - How much has your Friends group donated to support the library?
  - What “extras” has the library been able to purchase with that funding?
  - What aspect of the library are you especially proud of?

- **Needs:**
  - If the library had the funds, what programs could they expand? Could they add a new service or program? What are patrons asking for?
  - Is there a need to repair or restore the building?
  - Could the library add a service like e-Vehicle charging stations?

- **Thank You**
  - Send a thank you to the legislator and/or staff member who gave you their time.

**Be Prepared with Talking Points:** The “2021 Survey of Friends Groups Associated with Rural and Small Libraries” administered by the Friends of Libraries Section can be found on this website for review. Some interesting facts were discovered in the survey responses which can be used as talking points to highlight the importance of Friends groups to small and rural libraries. For example:

- **Membership:**
  - 17% of these Friends groups have memberships of 45-65 people
  - 15% have more than 150 members in their organization

- **What kind of financial support** do these groups provide to their libraries?
  - 25% of these groups donate $1,000 to $2,000 annually
  - 17% provide $5,000 - $6,999 each year
  - 11% provide $7,000 to $11,999
  - 20% provide $12,000 or more to their libraries

- **When asked how Friends groups use their funds to support their libraries:**
  - 72% reported their funds went to underwriting programs for all ages
  - 51% purchased furniture or fixtures
  - 27% gave funds for technology support
  - 29% of Friends groups made donations to a renovation, expansion, or new building project

- **Internet access** is big challenge for rural libraries:
  - 20% of respondents were unsure about the speed and reliability in their area
  - 38% deemed their area having fast, reliable internet
✓ 28% felt they had rather slow internet
✓ 15% indicated they were in an unserved area

Other Examples of Ways to Connect with Officials:
• Several Library Resources Councils’ Advocacy Committees around the state host a breakfast for elected officials. Be sure to attend and talk with them.
• “Speed Dating” with your Public Officials: invite local officials to an event where people are allowed ten minutes to speak with them. Attendees can meet with several officials in succession by moving from table to table.
• Create a short PowerPoint presentation that can be used in meetings with officials in various settings.

FLS Friends News and Notes: Past FLS newsletters have featured articles on advocacy that can provide some guidance and suggestions. Check out these articles on the FLS webpage, www.nyla.org/friends under Publications.
  • Advocacy and Palaces for the People – December 2019, p.2
  • Legislative Thank You Breakfast – March 2020, p.6
  • Creating and Sharing Meaningful Messages – December 2020, p. 4

United for Libraries: Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations, a division of the American Library Association, offers many advocacy tips on their website, www.ala.org/united. 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 if you would like our assistance to research a topic on behalf of your group.

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