Best Practices for Leadership of Friends Groups Supporting Rural and Small Libraries
by Lynne Madden, FLS Secretary

Finding members of an organization to serve in leadership roles can often be a challenge. When recruiting members to work with the Friends, we are prone to ask an acquaintance or neighbor like ourselves to become involved. The trick is to locate community members that bring different skills and priorities to serve the organization. These new volunteers can help you further your mission exponentially as you mesh their skill sets with those of your existing board members.

Focus on the assets your organization needs to thrive. What volunteers in the community can bring these abilities to the Friends, to become effective library civic leaders? FLS has a variety of publications and materials on our webpage to give you some guidance and suggestions.

Think Outside the Box: Look beyond your library patrons and consider experienced community leaders to serve. Their skills in leading other nonprofits or community groups will certainly translate to managing the Friends of the Library. Recruit people from all ages and backgrounds, from across your community. Give strong consideration to a leadership team, where two volunteers share the duties of one officer position (e.g., Co-Presidents, Treasurer and Deputy Treasurer) to make the tasks manageable, encourage mentoring, and establish a back-up system for key positions.

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 leadership topics:
- Best Practices for Management of Friends Boards
- Administrative Teams: A New Approach for Friends Leadership
- Effective Efficient Boards and Board Meetings
- Before Friends Become Frienemies
FLS Board Model: The Executive Board of the Friends of Libraries Section has developed a few strategies to deal with this issue ourselves.

- **Development of Detailed Position Descriptions:** Show prospective volunteers that the Friends are on solid ground by having carefully crafted, manageable position descriptions so new leaders are aware of the expectations people will have for them when they raise their hand to volunteer.

- **Mentoring:** Interested volunteers are identified and paired up with a Board member to observe what the position entails and assist with various activities with the aim of progressing to leadership positions.

- **Transition Statements:** At the end of every term of office, each Board member completes a Transition Statement that can be passed on and reviewed by the incoming Board member to assist them in preparing for their new position. A template for these Transition Statements is posted on this resource page.

See these FLS Handouts posted on [www.nyla.org/friends](http://www.nyla.org/friends) > Resources for Friends Groups Supporting Small and Rural Libraries > Leadership:

- Planning for Smooth Transitions: Tips for Friends Preparing for Leadership Succession
- Job Description Template
- Sample Volunteer Job Description: Book Sale Sorter and Assistant
- Template for a Transition Statement

FLS Friends News and Notes: Past FLS newsletters have featured articles on leadership 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.

- Leadership Success with a Team Approach – December 2017, p. 5
- Recruiting Our Leaders – August-September 2020, p. 7
- The TriPresidential Team of DeWitt and Jamesville – March 2020, p. 5

United for Libraries: Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations, a division of the American Library Association, offers many leadership and organizational tips on their website, [www.ala.org/united](http://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](mailto:FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com) if you would like our assistance to research a topic on behalf of your group.

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