Diversity
for Friends Groups Supporting Rural and Small Libraries
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**Why It Matters:** Our Friends groups represent the communities we serve, including people of different social and ethnic backgrounds, abilities, genders, sexual orientations, and lived experiences. As we welcome more people to take part and reflect the many different voices of our communities, we have an opportunity to showcase and celebrate a wide range of talents, expertise, creativity, and skills.

To create thriving, sustainable Friends groups, we need to recruit diverse members with different skills, attributes, and connections. This is one way to ensure a steady stream of new ideas and opportunities.

We know that representation matters – people are more likely to get involved in an organization where they can see themselves, and it helps to combat stereotypes. It is vital to the ongoing viability of Friends of the Library organizations to recruit diverse Board members who can share their experience and expertise.

When you share stories about your Friends group, include pictures of people who are involved, so others can see that your community is reflected in both leadership and membership. Work with NYLA’s ethnic and special interest affiliates to find people in your community who may be interested in being involved in your Friends group. When you do reach out to potential members, approach people respectfully, and share the story of the work the Friends do to support the library and the community.

**Landscape Review:** While we may think we may know who lives in our community, it is important to make time to do a landscape review to find out how it may have changed over the years. A good place to begin is with Census data through the American Community Survey, [https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs).

As you reflect on your organization, consider what talents and skills already exist on your board and in your membership. Are you leveraging those to the best ability? Are you missing talents and skills? How could you recruit potential members who could bring that to your Friends group?

**Asset Mapping:** One way to identify resources available to your Friends groups is through Asset Mapping, a tool developed as part of Asset Based Community Development. Asset mapping is a way to assess the strengths of your community – all of the skills, talent, expertise, and creativity that already exists. Begin with having each
of your Board members fill out an asset map (see reference below). Each person can think about who they know in their social circle, and what their skills are, what they are passionate about, and who else they might know.

Beyond individuals, gather information on associations and clubs, local institutions, local businesses, and physical spaces and places. In relationship to the Friends, each of these assets have skills, resources, connections, and issues or interests. As you contribute to a shared document, you will begin to get a rich picture of all the incredible talent and creativity in your community – and realize that you have an abundance of resources available to leverage on behalf of the library.

See these FLS Handouts posted on www.nyla.org/friends > Resources for Friends Groups Supporting Small and Rural Libraries > Membership, Volunteer Engagement, and Diversity:
• Resource Sheet: Asset Mapping Tool

FLS Friends News and Notes: Past FLS newsletters have featured articles on diversity that can provide some guidance and suggestions. Check out these articles on the FLS webpage, www.nyla.org/friends under Publications.
• FLS Commitment to Diversity – April 2022, p. 3
• FLS Member Spotlight: Jerrie Grantham – August/September 2021, p. 6
• Engaging Millennials as Volunteers – December 2020, p. 6
• Ready to Engage Millennials as Volunteers? – June 2020, p. 5
• More Murals at the Arnett Branch Library: Gifts from Our Dear Friends – December 2017, p. 6

United for Libraries: Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations, a division of the American Library Association, offers many resources 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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