

fact sheet #4

for Friends and Foundations

HOW TO ORGANIZE AN ACADEMIC FRIENDS GROUP

The idea of an academic Friends group is not new. In fact, the first university library Friends organization was founded at Harvard in 1925. Friends in academia can help their library by raising additional revenues for collections, materials, and equipment. They can also help raise the profile of the library on campus through the programs and events they sponsor.

1. Obtain support from the library administration. The group cannot succeed without their “buy-in” and participation.
2. It will also be important to get support and approval from the development office and the administration of the parent institution. Sometimes there is a perception that a Friends of the Library group on campus will be competing for the same funds as the development office. You will need to outline with the development office the role you will be playing in support of the library and how you will raise funds in a non-competitive manner.
3. Work with the library administration to select a steering committee of concerned persons from the alumni, faculty, student body, and the local community. Include a liaison with the development office. It may be important to have access to the institution’s attorney, public relations and advertising talent, and high-profile leaders.
4. Define the mission to be fulfilled by the Friends.
5. Determine and articulate the group’s goals so that you can create an organizational structure to accomplish them. This structure will include an executive leadership team and the task forces you’ll need to carry out your work.
6. Develop your group’s constitution and by-laws reflecting your mission. Visit the United for Libraries website for materials that will provide you with sample by-laws and assistance for writing your constitution.
7. Define your dues structure and membership categories based on what you hope to accomplish through membership. If you are using membership primarily as a fundraising tool, levels might be fairly high. If you are trying to achieve high numbers of interested people, the dues might be a bit lower. Consider any member benefits that will be available at different levels and possibly a special student membership.

8. Determine whether the Friends group will need a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status separate from the parent institution. See Toolkit #4, “Incorporating and Tax Exempting Procedures for Friends,” on the Friends & Foundation Zone on the United for Libraries website.
9. Prepare for a membership drive that will include a membership brochure. The brochure should be professional looking. Though it need not be expensive, the brochure will introduce your new group to potential members and should be well done. Determine what avenues you have available for distributing the brochure, including the use of social media. This may include a direct mailing to alumni, handouts at parent events and the library, and distribution to faculty and staff through inter-departmental mail.
10. Begin a publicity campaign using all available social media. Be sure to involve university public relations and development offices, the alumni office, and the local media. Tell why the Friends group has been established and how others can get involved.
11. Decide on a tentative schedule of meetings for the first year in order to involve new members on committees as soon as they join.
12. Set a date for an opening Friends membership meeting that includes a popular program component to help attract a large audience. Plan the program carefully and include an opportunity to elect officers who will act as the executive leadership team. See the United for Libraries Toolkit “Tapping Into the Biggest and Most Active Group of Volunteers in Town: The Baby Boomers.”
13. The executive leadership team should begin to plan for the year ahead, designing programs and projects that will raise money and visibility for the library.
14. Join United for Libraries to get access to our special toolkit for members only on how to start and re-energize Friends groups, archived “Friends on Campus” articles, and a host of other materials and advice to help you do what you do even better!

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