

fact sheet #18

for Friends and Foundations

BRANCH FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Branch Friends are becoming increasingly important in urban library systems as an advocacy tool and as a way to provide cohesiveness to a geographically wide-spread library system. They provide a special identity to their local community or neighborhood library. These are some tips on organizing these groups.

1. Define the purpose of Branch Friends versus that of the System Friends as a unit. Usually they have the most impact as an advocacy and small fundraising group. Existing groups should also be assured that they will not lose autonomy or the funds they raise. Even if they already have a 501(c)(3) designation, the group can be included in a “system organization” of Friends.
2. Identify the user profile at each of the branches in order to select representation on the steering committee and new board. Seniors and retirees, leaders of local ethnic groups, mothers of young children, and representatives of businesses may be the most effective members and leaders on a steering committee or board. Be sure to include representatives from groups that have the most local impact.
3. Find leaders in each branch community that see the potential of local support. Emphasize that the main group will help every step of the way. Discuss constitution and by-laws, taxes, newsletter, and programs.
4. Identify businesses with strong local ties in each area who can help provide publicity, funds, volunteers, and board leadership.
5. At an organizational meeting make clear that money raised by the branch group will remain to be used by the branch. A small percentage may be contributed for administrative costs to the “central” or “system” group if indeed this group provides service(s) to the branch groups. Discuss joint programming and how costs and profits can be shared.
6. Stress the importance of having someone from the branch serve as a representative on a central “Council of Friends.” Meetings of the Council may be monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly. These meetings are an opportunity to share problems and successes and give encouragement to one another and are crucial to the success of the program. At Council meetings no one branch should dominate, even if the group seems very successful. Success is measured differently in each branch.

7. Shared programming should be encouraged. A shared program can be as simple as having an adult or children's author visit each branch over a period of a day or two. Depending on the size of the system, there may be more than one visiting artist.
8. Have a single newsletter for all the branches, with items contributed from each one.
9. Plan an event where local city representatives visit the branch at the Friends' invitation at least once a year.
10. Hold an annual awards ceremony for the groups. Present special awards based on nominations from each branch and from the main/central/city group.

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