

# tip sheet #5

## Tools for Trustees



### **LIBRARY SUPPORT FOR FRIENDS ACTIVITIES**

ALTAFF is often asked if library staff should spend some of their time working with Friends, or if a library should share some of its resources to help a group be successful. Some have even wondered if staff time or library resources spent on Friends is a conflict of interest or a misuse of tax dollars! What we have found is that some of the best and most successful Friends groups do, indeed, receive support from the library. Some larger libraries whose Friends groups raise hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars actually have a library staff member hired expressly to support the work of the Friends. It's called development! It's hard to argue that it's not in the library's best interest to spend, for example, \$2,000 of library time and materials on Friends promotion and development when they get back \$25,000 in gifts from the group each year!

Below are some frequently asked questions that can help guide the library in deciding just how much time and materials should be devoted to the Friends' work.

#### **Is there a formula we should follow to know exactly how much library time and how many resources should be spent helping the Friends?**

There really isn't any set formula, but some "common sense" rules can guide you. For example, the amount of library support should just be a fraction of the amount the Friends donate to the library each year. In addition, the amount may vary over time. Often, new Friends groups are created by the library staff or Trustees, and in the first year, this fledgling group will no doubt need a lot of support in terms of planning meetings, promotion, copies, flyers, brochures, and membership recruitment mailings. Once the group is up and running, however, it will be able to operate with less staff time (in meetings, for example) and perhaps in support for flyers and postcards.

Other groups will work more closely with the library by creating joint programs, working on grants together, sharing library and Friends promotional campaigns, or printing a joint newsletter. Staff interaction with Friends may spike significantly depending on circumstances; for example, if the library is trying to pass a bond issue or make the case for a new building and the Friends are on the front lines of promotion.

For every library, the support will vary based on the Friends' needs, the staff's time, and the benefit coming back to the library in terms of annual donations by the Friends.

#### **Are there circumstances under which a library should withhold some level of support?**

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Certainly if a Friends group is not contributing back to the library on an appreciable and regular basis, the library should discuss with the Friends the level of financial contributions the Friends should make in exchange for staff and library support.

Also, beware of “creep!” A Friends group is an autonomous organization with its own 501(c)(3) status. The group should be self-sustaining to a large degree, and should be running its own organization and planning its own fundraising events. A library staff that pitches in too freely with the work may be lessening the engagement by the group’s members, and this is not sustainable over the long term.

**Are there other benefits to the library besides money that supporting Friends provides?**

Absolutely. Friends are called “Friends” for a reason. The best libraries in the country have tremendous community support. When the library works actively with Friends, it is creating powerful community advocates and promoters. Nobody knows better than a library Friend the importance of the library in the community. The more closely the library and Friends work together, the stronger the message, and the better that message gets out to the community.

ALTAFF strongly recommends that Friends and libraries develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) so that as the players change, the commitment from the library and the Friends stays stable.

For further information on Friends donations and a sample of a MOU, see Fact Sheet for Friends and Foundations #23, “Guidelines for Giving,” and Tip Sheet #4, “Sample Memorandum of Understanding.”

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