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Library Friends and Regional Library Networks

The pre-White House Governor’s Conferences on Library and Information Services have served to emphasize to all of us the importance of citizen input to — and interest in — libraries and library services. From around the country, reports of state conferences indicate that concerned citizens are banding together to form local, regional, and, in some places, state groups of lay people for the purpose of providing effective support for libraries. There is an excitement about libraries as a result of the pre-White House conferences. In a recent issue of Library Journal, we are reminded that “delegates are concerned citizens and have been preparing themselves for one year by reading, hearing, and thinking through thousands of resolutions, editorials, articles, etc.”1 This statement refers to Oklahoma White House conference delegates, but it applies to lay delegates from all fifty states.

However, not every concerned citizen is a White House conference delegate; many people who are involving themselves in statewide support groups represent local Friends of Libraries groups. Friends of libraries have been supporting their local libraries for many years. As Sandy Dolnick has so aptly pointed out, “All Friends of libraries are citizens. Therefore, all citizens are [prospective] Friends of Libraries.”2 Growing interest in friends activities at the state and national levels gives credence to the belief that citizens do care about libraries.

My personal association with a library friends group has given me an opportunity to see citizen involvement in action. Several years ago I was asked to join the Board of Managers of the Friends of the Denver Public Library. I am a library school professor, and as a professional, I do not have a vested interest in any one library. As a citizen, I have participated in concerned lay groups such as the League of Women Voters and a county-wide public school curriculum advisory committee. Therefore, I felt that the Denver Public Library’s Friends board would provide me with an opportunity to work closely with lay people concerned about libraries. The amounts of time, energy, imagination, and hard work which these people have volunteered on behalf of the library are amazing. There have been
legislative lunches, breakfasts, teas, cocktail parties, and tours of the library, and while not all of the city council members and state legislators have attended, the library's visibility is enhanced by the invitation. The Annual Friends Booksale netted almost $15,000 this fall, and again, the public relations benefit of this is outstanding. It is not the purpose here to dwell on friends of libraries projects, but I mention these two as examples of legislative and financial support which a friends group can provide.

In preparation for this paper I interviewed, in person and by telephone, a number of people who work with statewide friends and/or citizens groups. My aim in selecting interviewees was to be representative rather than inclusive. The main reason for this approach is experience with questionnaires. For example, in compiling A Directory of Friends of Libraries Groups in the United States,* it was almost impossible to be certain that every local and state organization was represented, and we discovered almost immediately after publication that many were missing. Similarly, responses to a national survey conducted by the Colorado state friends group during December 1978 indicated that while those who replied were most helpful, there were unanswered questionnaires. All of us who have conducted research projects using mailed questionnaires have experienced this problem.

Therefore, I approached the subject of "networks of friends" by starting at the national level. The White House conference office supplied some leads, my contacts on the National Friends Committee provided others, and each of these people suggested others. Those to whom I spoke who are involved with statewide friends and citizens groups were helpful, cooperative, and enthusiastic.  

Definition and Purpose

At the outset, a definition is needed. "Friends of the library" are those people who believe that any community is a better place in which to live if it has a first-rate library. They have a common concern for their library's active expansion and participation in community life, and they are convinced that good library service is important to everyone.

Local and statewide groups have similar purposes. The following list is a composite of goals and objectives statements from several friends groups:

1. to create and stimulate public support of the library's programs;
2. to interpret the library to the community;
3. to encourage gifts, endowments, and memorials for the library;
4. to provide financial support beyond the library's budget capacity;
5. to work for library legislation and/or appropriations at local, state and national levels;
6. to enlist increased support for libraries from decision-makers;
7. to create and/or intensify community awareness of the library's programs and possibilities;
8. to gain support for library expansion;
9. to campaign for better building facilities;
10. to sponsor programs designed to add to the cultural life of the community;
11. to participate in public relations activities in the community;
12. to provide volunteers for tasks the library cannot support from its budget;
13. to call public attention to outstanding achievements of the staff; and
14. to create understanding of the role of libraries in providing opportunities for education, literacy, and lifelong learning.

Local Organizations

How are friends groups organized and governed? The bylaws and constitutions of seven local friends groups from around the United States were analyzed and compared, and a number of items were found to be common to all. For example, all have a name, a purpose, a membership, officers, duties of officers, an executive board, meetings, dues, funds, and so forth. Several of the bylaws list the address of the association. A few of them, in their statement of "purpose," mention their connection with the library administration and the trustees group. One of the bylaws specifies that the group is not working on behalf of a political candidate. In some instances there is a paragraph telling when the group was originally organized, and several documents indicate under "membership" the types of members and the dues for each category. Most friends organizations have a board of directors in addition to the officers. The size of the boards vary, and in some instances there are detailed descriptions of committee rules and authority.

Statewide Organizations

An example of a statewide friends organization, now in its sixteenth year, is the Friends of Wisconsin Libraries, Inc. (FOWL). The brochure describing its activities states that "[FOWL is] a state wide volunteer organization of Wisconsin citizens interested in supporting, expanding, and improving libraries and library services throughout the state." Five purposes are listed:

1. Our purpose is to be the communicating link between libraries, their communities, and the state; to help inform citizens about
library matters; to be an instrument for potential action in public library affairs; and to seek closer understanding and cooperation between citizens, Trustees, Librarians, and their state organizations.

2. We encourage the formation of new Friends groups, providing information and speakers upon request, and inviting interested persons to attend our semi-annual workshops.

3. We stimulate existing Friends groups to wider and deeper activity through offering an award each year to the local group which has made the most significant contributions to its library's program.

4. We work to enlist support from civic leaders and governing officials for increased understanding and expansion of modern library systems and services.

The brochure further states:

The Board, in addition to the usual officers, consists of the past president, a member-at-large, and a Director and Assistant from each of the Wisconsin Congressional Districts. The Board meets two or three times a year.

The full membership is invited to participate in the fall convention of [the] Wisconsin Library Association, at which FOWL conducts a workshop and sponsors a joint luncheon with the Wisconsin Trustees Association.

The annual meeting of FOWL is held each spring immediately after National Library Week in a place selected because of special library activity in the past year. New buildings, new services to the community, a new director, or special exhibitions have occasioned the invitation from the local friends group for FOWL to hold its meeting in their community.

This group has a resource kit containing more than fifty items on such subjects as how to begin a friends of the library group, how to build membership, and how to plan purposeful service. The kit is available for $5.00, or $6.50 by mail. There is a quarterly newsletter, as well as occasional letters from the president. In one recent president's letter, Virginia Heinemann writes:

Due to the distances between members of the executive board a lot of work is done by committee. Friend of Friends chairman helps new or established groups with problems and handles the Library of the Year contest; legislative committee, through the
Samples of FOWL's bylaws, newsletter, and brochures are available upon request.  

The Friends of California Libraries also has an information kit in booklet format which discusses forming a friends group, budgeting, program possibilities, publicity, and bond issues for library buildings. This kit is available for five dollars. In response to my request for information about the Friends of California Libraries, James Buckley, director of the Marin County Public Library, wrote:

There appear to be no drawbacks to this state organization of Friends. It has been a positive factor in stimulating the creation of Friends groups and encouraging the growth and activities of established groups. The Friends of California Libraries Newsletter, Folio, announces and describes Friends activities and library happenings throughout the state. Both board and advisory board members are available and have spoken to individuals and groups resulting in creation of new Friends groups. In addition, participation by librarians in this organization has resulted in better understanding and cooperation between libraries and their users.

Wisconsin and California have had statewide friends groups for many years. In contrast, citizens in Pennsylvania and Florida have only recently formed statewide groups, as a result of their states' Governor's Conferences on Library and Information Services.

The Pennsylvania Citizens for Better Libraries (PCBL) was created and incorporated on October 20, 1978. One of the resolutions from the Pennsylvania Governor's Conference called for the creation of a statewide organization of friends and advocates of libraries. The thirty delegates picked to represent Pennsylvania at the White House conference served as the planning committee for the new group. Their first annual meeting
was held October 17, 1979, using the theme "Lobbying for Libraries: Citizens Make a Difference." PCBL, through its Committee on Legislation, has already developed a structure for a legislative network composed of local friends groups.

The PCBL membership brochure states that "together we can make the public aware of the needs and services of libraries; focus our support for libraries of all types; have a statewide impact on the future of information services; serve as a sounding board for citizen action; influence legislation." The brochure suggests several benefits of membership: "a newsletter with legislative updates; regional workshops on issues and concerns of library advocates; advisory services on organizations, public relations and lobbying; an idea exchange on programs and fund raising; a clearing house for information." The PCBL Newsletter is most informative, and minutes of board meetings which were submitted to me as background resource material indicate that a vital and concerned group of professional and lay people are keeping themselves aware of statewide library problems and concerns.

On August 14, 1979, the Council for Florida Libraries was incorporated. Council membership is open to all, and: "recruitment is urged of 'persons and organizations who have achieved a high degree of success and public recognition in the fields of business, industry, commerce, government, education, the arts or the professions. There shall be no political qualifications for membership." As set forth in their newsletter:

This citizens' group, an outgrowth of the Florida Governor's Conference..., is charged with creating greater public awareness of the role of libraries as an important resource for the cultural, educational and economic growth of Florida.

Citizen and library delegates and alternates to the Governor's Conference set the highest priority on enhancing public understanding of "the essential roles of all types of libraries and library services in the economic, cultural, and social life of the community."

The newly created council has been selected by the American Advertising Federation's State of Florida Chapter as its public service project for the coming year. The federation's project coordinator plans "to establish an all-media campaign to build library understanding throughout the state." One of the first programs of the Council for Florida Libraries is a Florida Book and Author Festival scheduled for February 18-29, 1980. In cities throughout the state, talks by authors will be given; each event will be co-sponsored by a local library friends group and the council.
A National Organization

A significant event in friends' support of libraries occurred in June 1979 with the formation of a national organization called Friends of Libraries U.S.A. Minutes from the June 25, 1979, meeting of the National Friends of Libraries Committee reflect that representatives of local friends groups from thirty-four states met with the committee during the American Library Association convention in Dallas. Ruth Frame, Deputy Executive Director of ALA, pledged support for the proposed national organization. Among the issues discussed were:

1. the organizational relationship among ALA, the Library Administration and Management Association, and Friends of Libraries U.S.A.;
2. the relationship between membership in Friends of Libraries U.S.A. and membership in ALA;
3. the role of Friends of Libraries U.S.A. in lobbying activity, particularly in connection with Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code;
4. the purposes of the organization as stated in the draft constitution; and
5. the use of the Friends of the Library National Notebook as the primary communication vehicle of the organization.

Following the discussion it was unanimously voted that a national organization called Friends of Libraries U.S.A. be formed. The purpose of the national organization is to encourage and assist in the development of friends of libraries groups nationally, to promote the development of excellent library service for all residents of the United States, to provide means for friends of libraries groups to have access to information and ideas that will prove useful in the operation of their organization, and to make the public aware of the existence of friends of libraries groups and the services they perform.

Historical Perspective

We have been looking at local, state and national friends of libraries groups, particularly with regard to recent events; however, there have been friends groups supporting local libraries for more than fifty years. According to the American Library Association, the first groups in the United States to be called "Friends of the Library" began in 1922 in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, and in Syracuse, New York. Both of these groups still exist today.

Friends of public libraries were especially important in the 1930s during the depression. In many places, the initiative for continuing public library services began with citizens who organized into citizens clubs and associations.

Local friends groups usually adapt their goals to meet the needs of their own communities; therefore, their purposes, organizational structures, and
contributions are varied. But, as mentioned earlier, there is a core list of activities common to all. There are also friends groups which support academic libraries, special libraries, and school media centers as well as public libraries.  

A survey of friends of libraries groups in sixty-four academic, public and special libraries was conducted in 1974, and results of the study were reported in the July 1975 issue of *College & Research Libraries*. This article is recommended because it contains a thorough examination of the origin, objectives, and government of friends groups, as well as an analysis of the structure of membership, activities, types of publications, and problems encountered in the friends groups studied.

Statewide friends groups date to the 1960s, but have increased in number during the past year largely as a result of the governors' conferences. Charles Benton, chairman of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, addressed the organizational meeting of Friends of Libraries U.S.A. and cited the excitement in the development of statewide citizens' action groups taking place across the country in support of libraries. He stated that if this were the only outcome of the governors' conferences, the statewide conclaves would be considered successful because they aroused citizens to action.

Networks of Friends

With the organization of local, state, and, now, national friends groups involving all types of libraries, there should be consideration of the idea of networks of friends. How can these groups work together for the good of all libraries? How can they communicate with each other? Will they? What are the advantages and problems of having a network of friends of libraries groups? Is such a network feasible?

In order to consider some of these questions, we must first agree on a definition of "network." Like the term system, the word network means different things to different people. For present purposes, a network includes a number of libraries or friends groups interconnected by communication links or channels which can be used for the cooperative exchange or transfer of materials and information. A network:

1. implies a formal organization of individual units;
2. provides a way for individual units to work together and to share resources and personnel;
3. expands and/or extends services to an ever-widening area of people;
4. has defined administrative responsibilities;
5. has defined goals and objectives;
6. provides a mechanism for keeping records;
7. enables units to share the costs of developing and producing materials too costly for one unit to bear by itself; and
8. facilitates the standardization of procedures.

Duggan states that: “networks, and the inter-library cooperation they require, offer an opportunity to combine materials, services, and expertise in order to achieve more than any one library can do alone. In this case, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, for each library can offer its particular patron group the total capability of the network, including outside resources not previously available.”

Olson, Shank and Olsen compiled a short list of the essential characteristics of a library and information network:

1. A network’s function is to marshal resources from its environment to accomplish results beyond the ability of any one of its members.
2. A network has developed an organizational design and structure that allows it to establish an identifiable domain and exercise appropriate influence over the members.
3. It has a base in communications technology.

Statewide friends and citizens groups have many of these characteristics implicit in their purpose statements.

Networks: Purpose, Organization and Activities

In order for us to consider a network of friends, it is helpful to look at the purpose, organization and activities of networks, and to compare these characteristics with the purpose, organization and activities of friends groups. Let us first consider five rather basic purposes of networks:

1. to share resources in order to accomplish results beyond the ability of any one member;
2. to provide a formal organization for the purpose of sharing resources and personnel;
3. to expand and/or extend services to an ever-increasing number of people;
4. to facilitate standardization of records and procedures and to share ways of more effectively serving constituencies; and
5. to share costs of developing and producing materials and/or technologies too costly for one unit to bear alone.

We are all aware of the spiraling costs of resources in libraries, such as journal subscriptions, books, media, terminals, equipment, and the necessary personnel to serve library users. Every library cannot possibly have
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everything its patrons request. Therefore, systems and networks provide a
means by which even the smallest library may have access to holdings of a
larger library through planned programs of sharing. This principle of shar-
ing materials and ideas is applicable to friends groups. Even the smallest
friends group can share ideas and materials with larger groups through a
network organized for such a purpose. The California and Wisconsin state
groups are performing activities of this type.

A network requires commitment, operational management and common
purpose. Through formal organization it is possible to carry out legal and
fiscal responsibility, planning and contractual commitments in order to
serve expanded constituencies better. A review of dozens of purpose state-
ments of friends groups reveals areas of commonality. The following list is
representative rather than exhaustive, but it provides a framework which
indicates that a network of friends groups, sharing a common purpose, could
be of mutual benefit to all:

1. to promote development of excellent library service,
2. to create and stimulate public support for libraries,
3. to create understanding of the role of libraries,
4. to enlist increased support for libraries from decision-makers,
5. to influence government to provide library and information services
   needed by citizens in a democracy, and
6. to participate in public relations activities on behalf of libraries.

Closely related to the purpose of an association are its activities. Among
the more frequently cited services or activities of a network are:

1. to identify patron groups;
2. to identify types and levels of service to meet patron needs;
3. to develop and share resources generously, systematically, and expedi-
tiously;
4. to serve as a public information office;
5. to provide training programs for network personnel and users; and
6. to evaluate services.

By combining their efforts, members of a network may reach increas-
ingly larger and different patron groups. In a mobile and diverse society
there is a need for people to have equal access to knowledge regardless of
their geographic location. An important network activity is the identifica-
tion of patron groups and provision for adequate service to all the people
in the network area. Public information programs are essential, and a net-
work makes it cost-effective to develop professionally a campaign which tells
citizens about the information available to them.
A friends group is formed to serve its own library and community; its activities will, by definition, be local in scope. However, all groups could benefit from shared program ideas, speakers, and practical information on such friends activities as fund raising (book sales, publications, trips, programs); service (volunteers take books to home-bound); information (legislative lunches, tours of library); publications (newsletters, annual reports); grants (special projects, rare books, films); and entertainment (film festivals, parties).

The final comparison has to do with organization. Networks and friends groups show similarities in this area. A network includes: (1) an organizational structure (voluntary or legislated; cooperative consortium); (2) a policy board (elected or appointed; sets goals, objectives, policies); (3) an operational office (paid staff; carries out policies and evaluates services); and (4) communication links or channels (to/from users; interface with other networks; exchange of materials and information). Friends groups, in contrast, are organized so as to contain: (1) a constitution and bylaws for each local unit; (2) a policy board and officers (to set and carry out goals, objectives, programs); (3) membership requirements (dues structure); and (4) communication with members, staff, administration, and other community groups via newsletters, meeting and press releases.

The organization, purpose, and activities of networks indicate that there are advantages to working cooperatively: the whole may accomplish more than its parts. However, as Becker and Pulsifer state: "More than lip-service cooperation is required of members of a network. Formal organization assumes participants recognize the value of membership and are willing to accept certain responsibilities. Participants should share a sense of common purpose and be willing to undertake legal, fiscal, and other contractual commitments to ensure the functional integrity of the network." A network of friends must consider these responsibilities.

Networks of Friends of Libraries

The national group, Friends of Libraries U.S.A., shares a common purpose with statewide groups: to encourage the development of local friends groups. These larger networks produce and provide sample materials about what friends are and how they can be used and have developed how-to-do-it kits to help people who wish to form a friends group. They will also send a representative to talk to a group of interested citizens about forming a friends group.

A regional, state, or national network of friends could be used to encourage the exchange of program ideas and speakers, and to discuss library and community interests. When a friends group has developed a
successful program or accomplished an outstanding fund-raising event, this could be shared with other friends groups. Just as many school and transportation districts are developing regional programs, so, too, could friends groups. This in no way destroys local autonomy or independence, but rather it expands and enhances a local group’s base for ideas.

Many local and state friends groups have developed legislative networks. Keith Doms, director of the Free Library of Philadelphia and chairman of the Committee on Legislation of the Pennsylvania Citizens for Better Libraries, states that “the network of local friend’s groups has the potential to play a strong, affirmative role in moving forward library legislation at both state and federal levels.”

There are thousands of interested and concerned citizens around the country who could be linked into a very powerful support group. Lay people do not represent a “vested interest” when they speak on behalf of libraries to their state and national legislators, local committee men and women, mayors, and commissioners. In a talk given at the Joint Mountain, Plains, and Colorado Library Association Convention on October 29, 1979, James Marvin, director of the Topeka (Kansas) Public Library said, “A statewide group of friends could be awesome, when welded together in the common cause of libraries, for their impact on the statewide or national scene.” He went on to say: “I feel added strength, indeed, when the head of our library board accompanies me to the capitol for a hearing before our legislative delegation from our county. Later, when bombardment is needed, how good to have the friends understand our problems, be involved in them, and writing and calling on our behalf. Friends groups are a part of the arsenal of library weaponry for effective library service delivery.” The political connections of this support group should not be overlooked. A national legislative network could be built on strong local and state groups.

I will briefly suggest two other activities of a friends network: to disseminate information and to be a channel for coordination and communication. Both will require careful planning — but all network operations require planning. Thought must also be given to the idea of having a paid staff person act as a coordinator at the state level — and perhaps at the regional and national levels.

Jeanne Raudenbush, president of the Board of Friends of the Denver Public Library, recently spoke of the idea of having paid coordinators. She commented that if a friends group in a small city (City X) wanted to know how to do a book sale, they could call a state coordinator who would know that City Y, which is approximately the same size, had just completed a successful sale and had written up a detailed plan. On a national scale, it could mean that someone from a very large metropolitan area library could find out about the activities of another metropolitan area friends group.
without having to depend on the library's professional staff and administra-
tion — and their national contacts. She went on to say, "There is a drastic
need for more coordination of support groups, and for these groups to unite
their efforts, and I feel that this must be done with paid people."25

The constitution and bylaws of the Friends of Libraries U.S.A. makes
no provision for such a staff position. I feel that this must be addressed in
the very near future, as part of the commitment to a functioning national
network of friends.

Communication — whatever that means to each of us — is a critical
aspect of network activity. A positive contribution to this area is the
Friends of the Library National Notebook which provides a vehicle for
sharing activity ideas and discussing issues.

The governors' pre-White House conferences gave impetus to the need
for citizens to be informed and organized in support of libraries. The Florida
Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services listed the fol-
lowing resolution as their number one priority:

Whereas, there is a lack of public awareness at all levels regarding
which library services are available; and
Whereas, Florida's citizens need libraries of all types to assist
them in everyday living;
Now, therefore, be it resolved that a public and professional
awareness program be developed on a local, state, and national
level to communicate the essential roles of all types of libraries
and library services in the economic, educational, cultural, and
social life of the community.26

This resolution and many others like it will be presented and considered at
the White House Conference on Library and Information Services. As this
state-of-the-art paper indicates, the interest, concern and impetus exist for
establishing a national network of friends, which would link the local, state,
regional, and national groups into what Marvin envisions as an "awesome"
library support group. Network development will not occur overnight. It
requires management, tact and careful planning, and there will be prob-
lems; but I feel that we are well on the way. A national committee of ALA
exists; a national organization has been established; and there are state and
local groups. The Notebook provides one vehicle for communication. A
structure for effectively linking these autonomous units is a logical next step.
Organizing the Library’s Support

NOTES

4. I would like to acknowledge that materials and ideas came to me from Barbara Cooper, Secretary of the Council for Florida Libraries; Susan Whittle of the Florida State Library; Lois Albrecht of the State Library of Pennsylvania; Sally Drew of the Wisconsin State Library; and Virginia Heinemann and Denise Wenger, both of the Friends of Wisconsin Libraries, Inc. James and Meg Buckley of the Friends of California Libraries, Nathan Gross of the Citizens for Washington Libraries, Evelyn Brewster of the Colorado State Library, and Jeanne Raudenbush of the Denver Public Library Friends also gave freely of their time and provided me with ideas.
6. Ibid.
9. For further information, contact Mrs. Harry Heinemann, Jr., 911 McIndoe St., Wausau, Wis. 54401.
10. Address inquiries to Friends of California Libraries, P.O. Box 4701, Whittier, Calif. 90607.
13. Ibid.
17. Ibid.


