Everybody Needs a Friend: the Value of Friends Groups to Libraries
Two Friends Groups

Friends of Merrill-Cazier Library

- Academic library group
- Started in 1995
- 365 members
- 6 member board
- Primary activities – fundraising through membership and donations and purchasing materials for the library, and hosting biannual speakers

Friends of Logan Library

- Public library group
- Started in 2014
- About 100 members
- 4 member board
- Primary activities – fundraising through book sales and purchasing materials for the library with the money earned, and hosting quarterly speakers
What is a Friends Group?

Wikipedia: **Friends of Libraries** are non-profit, charitable groups formed to support libraries in their communities.

There are Friends groups in all kinds of libraries (public, academic, school) all over the country.

ALA has an Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations - United for Libraries
Why Have Friends groups?

- fundraise
- speak in support
- support professional development and involvement
- network
- market and promote
- collaborate and cooperate
- for volunteers
- provide a boost
- celebrate, promote pride and accomplishment

(part of a list from Sally Gardner Reed’s The Good the Great and the Unfriendly pp. 20-21)
The shorter version of why

- Fundraising
- Advocacy
How to Start a Friends Group

- What you should know:
  - Requires a significant time commitment upfront
  - Strong foundation leads to better results
  - Library director plus a trustee and a few committed patrons are best to start with
How to Start a Friends Group

- The elements:
  - Develop a core group of members
  - Develop a written agreement between the Friends and the library
  - Develop bylaws and establish 501(c)(3) status
  - Develop group structure: leadership, committees, dues, etc.
  - Develop purpose, goals, priorities, etc.
How to Grow a Friends Group

- Ideas
  - Public awareness campaigns
  - Social networking
  - Letters to the editor
  - Higher visibility within the library
  - Friends of Libraries Week activities
  - Recruiting campaigns
  - Direct mail
  - Online membership applications
  - Brochure blitz at community events
  - Etc.

(part of a list from Sally Gardner Reed's The Good the Great and the Unfriendly, p. 29)
How to Grow a Friends Group

- Make service more attractive to retirees and millennials by breaking up large projects into smaller tasks
- Keep an accurate list of anyone interested in the group for future contact, especially those who have volunteered to help in some way
This sounds great! What can go wrong?!

- Separating the group from the library
  - Not sharing information
  - Not inviting someone from the library to meetings
- “Opposing library policy and/or direction” (Reed p.60)
- Withholding money from the library
  - Not providing it for a legitimate library need
  - Claiming ownership over money raised – so they should decide what it can be spent on
  - Giving it to other groups
- Stagnation
This often boils down to

- A misunderstanding of the friends group’s function
- Lack of information about library needs
- Personality and/or relationship issues
What can you do?

- Be friendly!
- Wait it out
- Include the Friends by sharing information, plans
- Consider disbanding the group
Ideas for Friends’ Activities
Resources


ALA United for Libraries Resources for Friends Groups
http://wwwALA.org/united/friends (Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations)