

Friends of Libraries Australia

In Australia, there are over 160 Friends groups which support their libraries — libraries which may be small regional and rural libraries, to large institutions. Their role is to support, help resource, and to inform the investment required of local and state government in public libraries. The value and importance of Friends as a form of philanthropy cannot be overstated. They provide financial support, act as advocates in the broader community for their library, participate in fundraising projects and activities, and give of their time in voluntary activities, to name just a few of their contributions.

The Friends of Libraries Australia Inc (FOLA) was launched in 1994 and represents Friends of library groups, who in turn represent some 8000 members who are supporters of libraries in Australia. These members support services representing some 6 million Australians. FOLA's aim is to support the important work being achieved by Friends groups nationally on behalf of libraries and the service they provide, recognising that libraries have obligations to administrative and funding authorities as well as to their user community.

If you are involved in establishing a Friends group for your library, you will find the website of FOLA at <<http://www.fola.org.au>> extremely useful. Your Friends group, and in turn Australian libraries in general, will benefit by joining FOLA. FOLA recommends that the aims of a Friends group should be to:

- Encourage the use of library and information services by the community
- Support and assist library management in the promotion and development of excellent library services
- Represent library users
- Undertake other activities appropriate to the interests of particular groups.

These aims can be achieved by:

1. Promotion: to act in a public relations role while promoting and/or organising cultural, educational and leisure facilities and/or activities in the library in question.
2. Fundraising: to raise funds and grant monies to support specific projects as requested by the library manager or as initiated by the Friends in co-operation with the library manager.
3. Lobbying: to bring pressure to bear on local, state and federal politician in matters of library policies and funding for library services.

FOLA has released an information sheet with key steps to establishing a Friends of your library group. The key steps are:

- Discuss the issues with a number of friends.
- Form a Working Group with four to six people.
- Write on one A4 sheet of paper the key aims and objectives in point form — be clear and brief, also prepare a draft constitution (FOLA can provide examples).
- Discuss the issues with the library manager, branch librarian or key stakeholder in the library.
- Contact similar Friends bodies in your area and discuss your concerns.
- Publicise a public meeting of interested persons, preferably at a time when you can gain the highest possible attendance.
- Your reasons for the meeting should be printed and publicised as widely as possible.
- At the first meeting, elect a steering committee, which may later constitute the basis of the new Friends group.
- Allow at least two to four weeks before the second public meeting is called to formally constitute the new Friends body, at which a formal constitution is adopted and a formal committee elected.
- Write to the library authority informing them of the resolutions of the meeting.
- Join FOLA and be a part of our national and international network of Friends.

After your Friends group is established, how can your

library maintain and support its members? FOLA recommends that library councils and management:

- Foster Friends of libraries groups as valued, independent, voices of the community about library services and needs.
- Specify the fostering of Friends of libraries groups in the role statements and performance indicators of library managers.
- Support the development of Friends of Libraries as independent incorporated bodies.
- Provide public liability insurance for the activities, programs and library fund raising of Friends groups.
- Support the development of Young/Junior Friends of libraries.
- Include a nominee(s) of Friends of libraries groups on council/regional library advisory committees
- provide Friends of the library rooms or lounges in new/rebuilt libraries
- provide publicity opportunities for Friends of Libraries groups.
- Follow the Australian Library and Information Association's Statement on voluntary work in library and information services (mentioned on page 25).

As well as these it is important for members of your library's Friends group to feel valued and included. A few ideas are:

- Invite them to library events.
- Seek their feedback and input.
- Give them membership benefits such as discounts on products and special events, e.g. bookshop discounts, conference fee reduction, discounts with partnership organisations.
- Keep them informed through a Friends newsletter or magazine.

In 2005, the Friends of Libraries Australia released *Friends of Libraries Resource Book*, by Daniel Ferguson. This is an authoritative guide and source book for establishing and managing a Friends group for your library. An order form for the book is available at <<http://www.fola.org.au/pdfs/resourcebookOF.pdf>>.

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