

GREAT LIBRARIES HAVE FRIENDS

Many libraries throughout Australia and worldwide have successful Friends of the Library groups. They have become a powerful and sustaining tool in aiding community development and library success.

Although the tradition for successful Friends of Library groups is most evident in the United States, groups in Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and Germany are challenging library managers to consider the future with a Friends group, rather than one without.

Creating a successful Friends partnership requires three things:

- successful Friends leadership,
- a willingness of library management to embrace Friends, and
- the understanding of both parties, as to defining each other's roles and responsibilities.

Great libraries have delineated these goals clearly, and the success of Friends groups at the New York Public Library, British Library, and National Library of Australia demonstrates this achievement and understanding.

Successful Friends groups embrace some common factors: partnership with stakeholders, community programs, high level of political judgement, ability in persuading decision makers, marketing excellence, and building new and sustainable markets with the community.

First and foremost, library managers must want a Friends group. In return, the Friends must recognise the authority of library management and each must embrace the other in an equal partnership.

Among many Friends of Library groups in Australia – around 130 – one group has, in recent years, built an enviable reputation for success: Port Macquarie (NSW). This group has received a total of five national awards from Friends Of Libraries Australia (FOLA). The group exemplifies the best in fundraising, advocacy, volunteerism, special events, and community partnering. However, their stand out achievement has been in the area of advocacy.

At Port Macquarie, a 'Meet the Candidates' evening was held prior to the 2011 NSW State Election. All five candidates were invited to answer questions ranging from local and state issues including library funding. The local ABC radio presenter was moderator and the Friends issued media releases before and after the event.

The Friends have learned the power of social media such as Twitter and



Facebook in engaging a new and younger audience, those considered a new political constituency: voters who may not be library users at present, but people who care about the public good. By acknowledging the fundamental importance of community engagement as both a cause and effect of social capital, libraries develop and articulate a process for engaging with their communities.


Port Macquarie Friends also appreciate that success comes from a partnership with the library. Creating a *Memorandum of Understanding* constitutes an operating agreement between the Friends group and library management, where the Friends agree to engage in advocacy on behalf of the library, under the guidance of library management. This has been a key aspect in delivering success for the Friends of the New York Public Library, displayed in such outcomes as their multi-million dollar library expansion of Central Library in Manhattan.

Friends of Libraries do not operate in a vacuum. They are part of a global network that strengthens civil society, upon which much of our world's well being depends.

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Presentation of the 2012 FOLA Colin Watson Award for Library Advocacy to the Friends of Port Macquarie Library. L-R Karen Brown (President), Jim Maguire (Library Manager), Judith Hansen (Past President), Debbie Sommers (Secretary), Daniel Ferguson (FOLA), with Peter Besseling (Mayor, City of Port Macquarie-Hastings), back row.




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