

How to Start a Friends' Group

This is a very basic guide to help you get started.

More information can be found in the books and papers listed in Further Reading.

The World Federation of Friends of Museums encourages people to start groups of Friends of museums, encourages them to band together in a regional association or a national federation, and provides the means for them to share information and experiences.

Does your museum need Friends? The concept that Friends should be an integral part of every museum is now well understood in many countries; but there are also many museums without such a group.

Major art museums world-wide have long had a 'society', often primarily to raise funds, but in recent years a wave of small museum expansion in rural, regional, suburban and city areas has caused a new need for Friends' groups that bring the museum closer to its public, and the public closer to its museum.

There are many different kinds of museums

Your museum may be a garden, a zoo, a house, a village, a library, an archive, a collection ... to be a museum as defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) you must have a collection, be open to everyone for study and for enjoyment, and be non-profit.

There are many different kinds of Friends

They may be members, volunteers, trustees, associates, honorary curators, supporters, benefactors or taskforce workers.

A group may be called a society, an association, the 'Friends of', or anything you and the museum management choose. It may range in number from very few to thousands. If a museum is too small to have a Friends' group, volunteers often function as one.

Members of these groups help a museum by their interest and their support in time, expertise and money. They usually pay a subscription and receive membership benefits. Volunteers may or may not pay a subscription and may receive privileges from the museum.

There are many ways to form a group

Perhaps from enthusiastic supporters who wish to help, from scholars or researchers who are associated with museum activities, or perhaps from management's address list of people who attend museum activities.

The Friends may be independent, although closely associated with the management, or they may be a department within the museum, sometimes called 'in-house'. The ideas in this guide apply more to the independent committee. Each country has its own legislation for the setting up of independent non-profit making associations. Consult with other groups, and your museum board, on the kind of association most useful for you.

Important First Steps - the reason for your existence

An essential first step for a curator, director or Board is to ask "Why does this museum need Friends?"

For a group of supporters it is to ask "What is the tangible role we can play that will benefit the museum? What are the potential resources we can find to benefit the museum?"

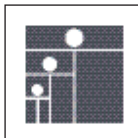
It is important that both management and Friends have a clear understanding of the purpose of the group and what its principal activities will be, as success depends on mutual acceptance and support.

Friends and staff can together decide on priorities for the group once the Friends' role is clearly understood.

Good communication between staff and Friends should be an on-going process, and clear arrangements should be made to achieve this.

The Friends' role may be

- a) To represent a bridge between the museum and the community.
- b) To lobby local, state and federal government, and local community and business groups when needed.
- c) To assist with the museum's public programs.
- d) To provide a taskforce to help with a wide variety of duties.
- e) To provide access to the collections and staff expertise through members' activities.
- f) To raise funds directly.
- g) To raise funds indirectly by providing a client base for museum fundraising, or by seeking donations of services for equipment.



Your Action Plan

- a) Agree the mission for the Friends - your founding charter.
- b) Invite enthusiastic and hardworking people, perhaps six or eight, to a meeting to plan the formation of the group. It is a good idea for a member of staff to be included. This will be the interim or steering committee.
- c) Arrange for a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.
- d) Find out what the museum can offer. Office space? Equipment: telephone, fax, photocopier, computer, email? Postage, paper, envelopes, printing? Any staff, or any budget for staff?
- e) Decide where the administration will be done and by whom. Decide the subscription cost, if any, for the first year, to cover administration.
- f) Plan a public meeting or event, in the museum, to introduce the Friends' group to the community.
- g) Invite people to attend the event, and to join the group, by letter, personal invitation, radio, or by whatever means are available to you.
- h) Prepare receipts, membership cards, printed material and a program of activities for the members to be ready as soon as your letter of invitation is sent out.
- i) Plan activities and benefits for your members relevant to the needs of your museum.
- j) Draft Statutes or Rules that will be approved by all the membership at a later date at a general meeting.
- k) Be ready to share your experience with other Friends of museums.
- l) Join WFFM - either by joining your own national federation, or as an Associate Member.

Further Reading

HANDBOOK FOR FRIENDS

British Association of Friends of Museums, 33 page booklet of practical advice for setting up and running membership groups for museums. Cost £5.00 for the Handbook for Friends, and £6.80 for the Handbook for Heritage Volunteer Managers and Administrators.

Contact:

BAFM Secretary: Deborah Woodland

The Shrubbery, 14 Church Street, Whitechurch, Hampshire, RG28 7AB, UK

E Mail: deborah@wheelerco.co.uk

BAFM E Mail: admin@bafm.org.uk

GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A FRIENDS ORGANISATION

Netherlands Federation of Friends of Museums, A detailed guide book in English, The Hague, 1993, 48 pages, ISBN 90-801143-2-4.

Contact:

Netherlands Federation of Friends of Museums

Rapenburgerstraat 123, 1011VM Amsterdam

Postbus 2975, 1000CZ Amsterdam

Fax 020-5512901

E Mail: info@federatievriendenmusea.nl

GUIDEBOOK: HOW TO START, MANAGE, MARKET AND MAINTAIN A MUSEUM SUPPORT GROUP.

The Australian Federation of Friends of Museums, Ed. Max Dingle, Sydney, 1999, 119 pages, ISBN 0 646 37344 7.

Contact:

Australian Federation of Friends of Museums c/o Australian National Maritime Museum GPO Box 5131 Sydney, NSW, Australia

E Mail: maxdingle@anmm.gov.au - info@affm.org.au