



Developing your Friends Group

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Friends Groups Overview

- At heart, a Friends organisation is one whose **core purpose** is to support another organisation, in this case a museum (or group of museums, or a museum service or one particular part of a museum).

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What's in a name?

- Friends
- Supporters
- Special interest group

You need to be clear about your purpose, and so does the other organisation!



Friends Groups – what do they provide for the museum?

- Financial support
- Emotional support
- Expert advice
- Advocacy
- Social capital (or covert Advocacy)

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Financial support – through subscriptions, donations and fundraising events, for any need which the museum can identify. If your Friends group wants to cover your heating costs, great. There is no rule against it, but most Friends groups support the core stuff of acquisitions, conservation and education

Emotional support – a “critical friend” for the museum staff, particularly the CEO, Director or Curator, to use as a sounding board for new ideas, solutions to problems

Expert advice – either on subject matter (a lot of your Friends will be experts in your subject) or on something else that you need help with

Advocacy – speaking on behalf of the museum, in its interest, with the authority that an external voice can often have

Social capital (or covert Advocacy) - Social capital is the network of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. Through it you can create a positive image of your organisation. Through their individual networks, your Friends can enhance your image. You can bask in reflected glory when they talk about you to their friends, or when they visit other museums!



In return, they are offered (or expect?) benefits

- Exclusivity/special treatment
- Third party benefits
- Involvement as volunteers
- Consultation about developments within the museum
- To be able to influence decision making
- Hotline to the curator/director
- Having a louder voice than other stakeholders

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Exclusivity/special treatment – behind the scenes access, invitation to previews, use of premises, use of collections, closer relationship with staff, discounts on tickets, no requirement to book (eg Tate Members), own exclusive space in the museum (eg Tate, Quilt Museum)

Third party benefits – eg museum (or Friends group) does a deal with a local restaurant which provides free/discounted services for Friends at specific times (eg preview evenings) or all the time (eg Tate Members free cocktails); also discounts in shops related to subject matter (Quilters' Guild members get discounts in fabric shops across the country)

Having a louder voice than other stakeholders a note of caution about this – whilst you have a special relationship with the Friends, you probably cannot afford for this to skew your relationship with other stakeholders.



Other expectations/benefits, which may not relate to the museum operation

- Trips and visits to other places of interest, sometimes but not always facilitated by the museum
- Social engagement, with each other, based on shared interest

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How are Friends Groups constituted?

- Formally, as charities (there are now 7 forms)
– independent legal entity
- <http://www.lawworks.org.uk/index.php?cID=10359>
- <https://www.gov.uk/charity-types-how-to-choose-a-structure>
- Informally, as a group within the museum audience

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Formally, as charities

Two of the forms only became law in March 2013 - CIOs – Charitable Incorporated Organisations, of which there are two types.

Refer to guidance from LawWorks website on choices. Excellent comparative document which takes you through such useful things as whether this model is right for you if you're fundraising and if so why, whether this charitable model will allow you to trade (some Friends' groups trade on behalf of their museum) and if so, what type of trading (primary, ancillary or non-primary).

Also govt website which guides you through the decision making process and includes a section on how to write your charitable document and template documents which you can use.

Think about what your charity will do – what is its purpose, how much control do you want, will you employ people, take on contracts, and whether it will be run by a small group of people or a wider membership

Informally, as part of the museum organisation

Not a legal entity in its own right, completely under the control of the museum. Several museums are going down this route at the moment – less cost up front, same ongoing "maintenance" costs and easier to disband if need be.



Pitfalls

- Clashes of interest
- Relationship not being negotiated at outset
- Relationship not being actively maintained
- Different agendas
- Stakeholder representation

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Clashes of interest – collecting in the same area; close relationships with governing body of museum; one individual wearing too many hats

Relationship not being negotiated at outset so what is expected, by either party, is not clear, not understood or not accepted

Relationship not being actively maintained so gradually the two parties drift. If this were a personal friendship rather than a professional one, we'd say we had "grown apart" (when what we actually meant was that we had become *less necessary* to each other and therefore hadn't maintained the relationship)

Different agendas; lack of shared purpose; rapidly changing museum agenda not matched by that of Friends; a result of not maintaining the relationship

Stakeholder representation – Friends may represent one segment of audience/visitors but may not be sympathetic to other target audience groups eg families with young children, socially disadvantaged people, those who have been marginalised by society. Museum may be under pressure, particularly if funded by a local authority, or by HLF or other foundations, to develop the breadth of its audiences. This means that different audience segments need to be accommodated under one roof, often at the same time. Some stakeholders, including Friends groups, may find it hard to share space with people who are very different from them.



Successful Friends schemes are those where

- the **relationship** between the museum and its supporters is **clearly defined** and well understood by both parties
- **supporting the museum is the primary purpose** and any other is secondary and managed as such, and
- **both parties are as engaged** as each other.

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Different models for working together



The Collaboration Continuum

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This slide is adapted from **Leading Across Boundaries** by Russell Linden, which I recommend.

It shows three different models for how Museums and Friends Groups might work together. Any one of these is acceptable, as long as it's what both parties want. The further to the right you go, the more effort each party will need to put in and the more productive the relationship will be.

In the notes accompanying the three following slides are examples of the behaviour you might expect each party to be engaged in, in each model or way of working. These are not exhaustive lists!

The behaviours are incremental. What happens if you're operating in Coordinating mode may build on the activities and behaviours of the Cooperating mode. Because this is a continuum you may span two modes. If you want to move forwards, consider the Skills for Collaborative Working slide and identify which areas you need to work on together.



Cooperating

- **Sharing information**
- **Being polite**
- **Playing well with others**

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Sharing information

- Curator sends Chairman of Friends the exhibitions programme, **for information**
- Chairman of Friends sends curator a list of members and their addresses, after the AGM each year
- Friends transfer half their subs to the museum every year
- Curator **tells** Friends what their money has been used for

Being polite

- Each year the museum acknowledges the Friends' financial contribution and the Friends acknowledge whatever the museum has done with that money, in their respective Annual Reports

Playing well with others

- Friends meet in the church hall, not in the museum (so as not to cause inconvenience)
- Friends use remaining subs on visits to other museums and hold fundraising events for their visits (nothing wrong with this as long as their constitution allows it)



Coordinating

- **Joint planning**
- **Adjusting to each other's actions**

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In addition to what's happening in the Cooperating model...

Joint planning

- Chair of Friends and Curator meet once a year with a plan for their own organisation
- Curator identifies projects/acquisitions for Friends' financial support
- Curator requests 10 volunteers to man front desk during August knowing that 2 staff want time off
- Chair of Friends explains plan to ask local restaurant to provide discount of 15% to members
- Friends meet in the museum's education room on Mondays when the museum is closed to the public

Adjusting to each other's actions

During the planning phase each will accommodate the other, eg

- Friends' overseas visit is planned for September so that volunteers are free for August volunteering duties
- Curator adjusts timing of local art society show so that it can coincide with Friends' main fundraising event
- Chair of Friends increases Friends' contribution in light of acquisition plans
- Chair of Friends adjusts discount request to 10% on learning that the museum is also approaching the restaurant over catering for previews



Collaborating

- **Working together on projects**
- **Shared purpose, shared risk, shared benefit**

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In addition to what is happening in the Coordinating model...

- Curator and chairman meet regularly to review their organisation's strengths (note purpose of meeting which will lead to better shared understanding)
- They sit down together to plan shared projects and each also has other projects which are independent; these are also discussed and any clashes identified
- Chairman of Friends brings suggestions from the Friends of projects they'd like to support; these are discussed and agreed or not
- Friends fundraise specifically for the shared project, using museum resources (venues, printing)
- Friends' support goes beyond financial eg if the Museum wants to install a new kitchen and one of the Friends has project management skills they are invited to review the plans and suggest improvements for cost control, schedule management etc
- Shared KPIs may be developed
- They agree that *either* Curator *or* Chairman will approach the local restaurant to get the discount for both parties



Clarity of purpose There's no point collaborating if both parties aren't clear about what they want individually, what's in it for them, and also what you want to achieve together. A proper understanding of your organisation's values, your mission, how you work internally, how you're perceived externally and what value you already deliver is essential. What are the drivers? What is the purpose? What are the aspirations?

Appetite for risk Developing a Friends group, or developing an existing museum/friends relationship represents change and in some respects, risk. Your partners (Friends or Museum colleagues) will have a different (or no) experience of risk management. Some of your ideas and plans may represent unacceptable reputational risk for a Friends group – eg an exhibition about gay rights.

Trust If you trust your colleagues and partners, you will be able to plan effectively, spot problems ahead of time, address issues as they arise and learn from the experience. Lack of trust, driven by fear and consolidated by our previous experiences, is the biggest barrier to working collaboratively.

Willingness to share This is a logical follow on to trust. If you do not fear a bad outcome (ie if you trust the other party), you will be prepared to share your views, whether others agree or not, whether you're right or not. Building trust is based on openness. Remember: Information is power and power games have no place in successful collaborative working.

Right people The ability to bring the right people to the table, and the right skills. Depending on the projects that you and your Friends, or you and your Museum identify, either one of you will have a wide range of skills and knowledge to bring to the table. Do not be afraid to ask for what you need (and don't be offended if the answer is no).

Communication You will need a range of well-honed communication skills and be flexible in your use of language – this is particularly the case for local authority museums which use the language of local government! Use email to impart factual information; use the phone if you want to build the relationship or seek a dialogue.

And a word about unwritten hierarchies In Museums and Friends groups there are those who have authority through their position – Curator, Director, Chairman, Treasurer - and there are those who have authority through

force of personality, wealth or connections. Be aware of all of these when you are building or maintaining a relationship.

Scenarios



- A) you and three friends enjoy visiting your local museum and would like to start a Friends group.
- B) you're a new museum curator and are surprised to find there's no Friends group for your museum. You're keen to establish one.
- C) you're a museum curator and the local Friends group are talking about buying a painting for the collection. It doesn't fit with your collecting policy.
- D) your local Friends group is dwindling – membership is falling and it's getting harder to maintain contact. What do you do? Discuss this from the point of view of being a Friend, and being the museum curator.
- E) There is hostility between the museum and its Friends Group. Neither party seems able to pinpoint where it started to go wrong, but you're now at a stage where the Friends group is doing nothing for the museum and the museum is doing nothing for the Friends. Discuss what your options are both as the Chairman of the Friends, and as the museum curator.

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If you do this exercise with a group of colleagues you might think about the six skills for Collaborative working from the last slide.

What is the purpose? How do you build trust in this situation? Who are the right people to involve? How risky is this situation – what's to gain and what's to lose? How much can you share with the other party? How are you going to communicate in this situation – what do you need to say, how best to say it, how will you behave?

Put yourselves into the shoes of the other party. How does this situation look from their point of view?

Try to think operationally (ie short term) and strategically (longer term wins)