

## Why Friends Need New Active Members ★

The number one issue Friends of the Library groups face all across the country is the struggle to recruit new active members.

While current Friends members worry about where the next generation of volunteers will come from, the good news is that the next generation of volunteers is just now retiring, and many more will be retiring over the next decade! That's right – the baby boom generation is getting ready for its next great adventure.

In addition, the Millennial generation are active library users, and are looking to be engaged. According to Pew Research Center survey data from fall 2016, 53% of Millennials (those ages 18 to 35 at the time) reported using a public library or bookmobile in the past 12 months. The same survey data showed 45% of Gen Xers, 43% of Baby Boomers, and 36% of the Silent Generation reported the same.

As far as the baby boom generation, this group has always gotten a lot of focus and press, and as this generation retires, the attention as to what they are doing and why continues. Reports are popping up everywhere that take a look at what retirement will mean for them. The findings from these studies are fascinating and have important ramifications for Friends.

The most important finding is that the vast majority of newly retiring professionals are committed to "giving back" to their communities. In large numbers they express a desire and willingness to volunteer in their communities. Millennials are also increasingly looking to volunteer their time and talents in order to make a difference. This makes both groups perfect potential Friends volunteers!

If your group is to take advantage of the new baby boom retirees, it will be important to know what makes them tick. They are different than "yesterday's volunteers." In the past, it was the stay-at-home mom who made up the core of America's volunteer workforce. These women who were raising their families had both time and inclination to also serve their communities. From school, to the hospital, to the library, these women helped make nonprofit organizations great.

Over time, however, more and more women began to enter the work force along with raising their families. As this happened, they had less time to contribute volunteer services, and those who did often confined their efforts to where their children were – i.e. schools, Little Leagues, church youth programs, etc. The result? The women who made up the core of library Friends groups were seeing fewer and fewer recruits from the community. (This group has *primarily* been comprised of women, but certainly not entirely.)

This toolkit is designed to explain exactly how today's volunteer is different and what that means for the way your group is structured and operates. It will provide you with tips that others have adopted to attract new retirees, as well as advice for finding new volunteers and reeling them in.

## How Today's Volunteers Are Different ★

Before your group makes an effort to attract new volunteers, it's important to understand how they are different and what they are looking for in the way of volunteer opportunities – and they are! So, just how are these new volunteers different? Below are characteristics that are common among them:

- They are better educated than their predecessors and most will have worked full-time prior to and during their volunteer service.
- They want to apply their skills and know-how in their volunteer work.
- They have traveled across the country and globe and will continue to do so.
- They want to see tangible results from their efforts.
- They will likely volunteer for a number of organizations – not just one.
- They want a great degree of flexibility in their volunteer schedule.
- They want to have input into how their work is accomplished.
- They are healthier than the last generation and want to stay active.
- They see volunteer work as a way to remain socially active.

Above is a very good list of what they want, but . . . studies and surveys show that there is definitely one thing they don't want . . .

*They don't want to sit in meetings!* At least not the kind that happen once a month and everyone sits around and listens to reports. When you think about this new crop of volunteers coming from the professional world, it's really no surprise. They've been sitting in meetings all their work lives. Now, they want action!

When you consider the key components of what the new recruits are looking for – flexibility, tangible results, and the ability to have some input in what they are doing and how they do it, coupled with a lack of a desire to sit through monthly meetings – it's easy to see that for most Friends groups, things must change.

Here is what the typical Friends group currently looks like and how they operate: the Friends board is comprised of the officers and the committee chairs. They meet once a month (perhaps skipping summers) and at their meetings all the committee chairs report about what they are doing.

The committee chairs are usually people who have been in the position for awhile – or have been recycled from past service on the board as an officer or from another committee. The committees typically include membership, programs, book sale, nominations, newsletter, and publicity. The term "committee" is likely a misnomer, as all too often the chair actually is the committee and does most or all of the work. The book sale committee does pull in a number of volunteers out of necessity, but the chair is likely to have been in place for a long while, because after all, she (or he) has done it for so long that only she (or he) really knows how to run the sale.

## ★ Toolkit: Engaging New and Active Library and Friends Volunteers ★

When you break down each of the four programs above, there is plenty of room for creativity. Taking a look at each goal area will give you place to start coming up with possible strategies and tactics. Just as an example, here's what you might come up with for increasing your group's membership:

### Increasing Membership

- Public awareness campaign about Friends
  - Social media
  - Website enhancements
  - Letters to the editor
  - Higher Friends visibility within library and community
  - National Friends of Libraries Week activities
  - Local media promotion
  - PSAs
- Recruiting new members
  - Direct mail
  - Online membership / credit card acceptance
  - Each one reach one
  - Brochure blitz at local community events

Breaking down each goal area into possible strategies will help you to see that functioning as a leadership team will probably translate into higher impact for the library. It will also require lots of active members! What? You are no doubt reading this toolkit because you don't have enough active members as it is. Now you are reading that to change the way your group operates, you're going to need more? Yes, you are, and guess what? By looking at specific goals and projects for the coming year and brainstorming about ways to accomplish those goals, you will be setting your group up to become much more attractive to new active members. Members who want to engage in a project that has a beginning and an end.

Members who want to see the results of their efforts, members who want to use their skills and socialize with others.

Once you've done the planning, you are now ready to recruit the task forces to help you accomplish your goals. The leadership team can recruit just one task force at a time to achieve its goals or several can be working at the same time with the leadership team monitoring and supporting their efforts.

There are likely two main reasons that Friends groups aren't attracting new active members. The first is that they aren't asking – at least not aggressively and proactively. Get on the phone, talk to your neighbors, turn that incidental meeting with an acquaintance at the grocery store into a discussion about the exciting volunteer opportunities your group has.

This leads to the second reason groups have trouble recruiting: they aren't specific about what they are asking for. Who wants to become chair of the membership committee? What does that mean, what does one have to do, how long does the assignment last, will there be any help, and how much time will it take? These are all the questions a good potential volunteer will want to know and once he or she does – the answer will probably be “no,” at least with members of the “new” volunteer force.

On the other hand, imagine you are back on the phone and instead of asking your friend to become chair of the membership committee (and perhaps its only member as well), you are asking her to join a special task force for publicizing Friends in advance of a membership recruitment campaign. Because your leadership team has done some strategic thinking of what that might entail, you can hand over some initial ideas, such as creating social media buzz, developing membership brochures, working with the local radio station to develop PSAs for Friends, and designing activities around National Friends of Libraries Week, for example (for more information, visit [www.ala.org/united/friendsweek](http://www.ala.org/united/friendsweek)). You will have a timeline in place and can let potential members of this task force know that you'd like the campaign to continue for six months and they, in turn, might be recruiting members for mini-task forces to complete some of the objectives.

If your leadership team does a little homework, you should be able to identify potential volunteers for the public awareness campaign who have worked in marketing and promotion or are currently working in that field. That way you can target folks who want to use their knowledge and expertise to give back to the community. Once you've pulled the team together, offered them whatever resources you have available for the effort, asked for reports to the leadership team on a regular basis (this can be done by email, phone, or even in person), you're ready to let them take it on. Perfect!

## Nuts and Bolts of Working with Volunteer Task Forces ★

While you'll find that today's volunteers want to have control over their projects and a significant amount of authority to accomplish their work as they think best, they will absolutely still need guidance and support. It's important that every task force you recruit have the following information:

- Specific end product or goal for their work. For example, the public awareness task force's goal should be to “ensure that key community influencers know about and appreciate the work of the Friends of the Library.”
- Budget and resources available to them.
- Timeline – when the work should begin and finish.
- Background information that will help them. This will include information on what the Friends have done for the library over the course of the past year and historically, how much money was raised last year and over time, what new materials and equipment were purchased, and how long the Friends group has been existence, for example.
- A list of ideas the leadership team has come up with to help the task force hit the ground running.
- Reporting requirements on project progress – to whom and how often.
- Name, address, phone, and email of their liaison on the leadership team.

Each task force will need a team leader. I know that sounds suspiciously like a committee chair but because this work has a de-