

Idea Popcorn 2013: Ideas For Friends, From Friends

Programming Models, Fundraising Tips, and General Advice

The diverse ideas and best practices listed below were captured October 11, 2013, during the Minnesota Library Association Conference in St. Cloud. Each year, as part of a day-long “Friends of the Library” track, MALF hosts a special panel during which Friends can ask advice and share tips. We hope these highlights prove “food for thought”!

Thanks in particular to Friends from Alexandria, Marshall-Lyon, Ramsey County, Rochester, St. Michael/Hanover, St. Paul, and Washington County for contributing.



Book Sale Ideas

Advertise. All too often, Friends hear about sales only after the fact from acquaintances or colleagues. Invest in advertising... it’s cheaper than you think. United for Libraries and MALF can both offer advice on pop-up banners and other signage. Moreover, there are FREE tools at your disposal. One particularly worthy of mention is bookfinder.org. This website is quickly gaining a reputation as “the book browser’s best friend.”

Categorize. It takes extra time on the front end, but it is well worth your while to organize books as much as possible before your sale starts. Patrons are likely to come in with an interest in one or two genres in particular. There’s fun in “the hunt,” but it’s always a shame when browsers walk right past the very title they’ve been looking for.

Coupons. Everyone likes a good deal! In order to get patrons (including those who don’t make a trip to the library part of their regular routine) into the library during your book sale, experiment with coupons. “Buy one, get one,” “\$1.00 off,” and “one free – no strings attached” are all valid options. Give well-networked Friends a small stack to hand out, or leave some in heavily trafficked community spaces.

Non-Coupon Discounts. If a coupon campaign is outside your budget or too difficult to coordinate, consider fun alternatives. Examples include “\$1.00 off with a canned food item donation for the local pantry” and “save \$1.00 when you bring and use your own bag.”

Preview Sale. Your Friends membership pays dues and works hard year-round to make your organization a success. The book sale offers the perfect opportunity to say “thank you,” with a preview sale. A preview sale is just what it sounds like. You simply give Friends first crack at your deaccessioned and donated book inventory before officially launching your book sale weekend.

Theming. Here’s an idea that’s so good it’s *spooky*. Consider timing and theming your book sale to match the next holiday. One area Friends group is coordinating their 2013 sale to line up with Halloween. Friends volunteers will staff the book sale in costume! Naturally, the concept is customizable. We hope to see a Santa or two manning pay stations sometime soon!



Other Fundraisers

In-Library “Boutique.” We all know of public libraries that house “extra” facilities – coffee houses, craft kiosks, and book stores, to list just a few of the more common. But a *boutique*? Friends at the Jessie F. Hallett Memorial Library have had success with this novel expansion. In order to help fund an ongoing facilities expansion, the Friends solicited donations and repackaged jewelry, clothing/scarves and other fine items for resale in a library “boutique.” Due in part to a \$1,000 matching grant, they raised \$2,600! It’s looking likely that the boutique will remain a permanent fixture.

Themed Calendars. Friends at the Jessie F. Hallett Memorial Library in Crosby, Minn., have had tremendous success with a themed calendar fundraiser. In this year’s edition, each month’s page features the local “Ladies of the Friday Study Club,” an area book club that has been around for generations.

For most, calendars are simply one of those small purchases you make once a year without giving much thought to. But if your organization thinks ahead and themes appropriately, you, too, might find that this is a fantastic way not only to raise money, but to keep the library top of mind year-round! From a planning standpoint, it’s not nearly as hard as it sounds. You can place all orders through Vistaprint, and only pay something in the neighborhood of \$5.00 for each.



Mascots and Miscellaneous!

Brochures. We know you have a brochure, but how effectively do you use it? Consider divvying up a portion of your stock to socially active Friends. Maybe they can make a “convert” or two without even needing the investment of a postage stamp!

Holiday Activities. If ever there were an outlet to express your creativity, this is it! Christmas is perhaps the best example, but all major holidays provide opportunities for programming/ activity tie-ins. Here in Minnesota, stocking decorating (both to adorn the library and for kids to bring home) has proven a great way for Friends to engage kids.

Mascots. Consider giving the library and/or the Friends a “face.” In Rochester, a mannequin named “Paige Turner” boasts her own Facebook page and is prominently featured on a number of programming promotional pieces. Ramsey County has a variation on this in the form of a library dog named “Booker.” Booker (an adult in costume) makes an appearance at big library events, and proves a hit every time.

Outside Resources. Check the United for Libraries (formerly ALTAFF) website frequently. United for Libraries is the national Friends of the Library group and an official arm of the American Library Association. It offers a wealth of information on grants, fundraisers, awards, and programming.

If your questions are of a legal nature, get in touch with MAP for Nonprofits at mapfor nonprofits.org. They help Friends of the Library (and particularly newly formed groups) on a regular basis. Tell them MALF sent you!

If you are researching funding options for Friends incorporation, general library operations, or even a special project, be sure to also check out the Minnesota Department of Education’s website. If you have specific questions, Bruce Pomerantz with Minnesota State Library Services is your go-to guy.

If you have ideas you’d like to contribute to the ongoing discussion and don’t want to wait until October 14 (the next MLA Conference) to share them, send an email to info@mnlibraryfriends.org. We may feature you on our website and in our next MailChimp eBlast!