

# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

**Starting a  
Friends Group**

Panhandle Library Access Network, Inc.

Pat Wagner  
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Outcomes

- Recruit a core team of supporters to help get your new Friends group up and running.
- Ensure your Friends nonprofit leaders know their legal and financial responsibilities.
- Develop a plan for the first year's operations.

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Key Idea

**A library Friends group's  
success comes more from  
effective planning than relying  
on excellent used book sales.**

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

## Agenda

- Quizzes to Evaluate the Current Situation
- The Basics
- Recruitment: What Attracts and Keeps People
  - Your Core Team: Build Your Board
  - Your Volunteers: The Eyes, Ears, and Hands
  - Your Community: Build Your Network
- Money: Are You Courting the Right Kind?
- Promotion and Support: Connections
- Resources

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## Quiz 1: Fundamentals Score

- Up-to-date state and federal tax status
- Strategic plan: Your community contract
- Core team: Energy and focus
- Current board by-laws: Simple and effective
- Job descriptions for board and volunteers
- Written guidelines for library relationship
- Written guidelines for foundation relationship
- Active recruiting of strategic partners

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

## Quiz 2: Team Health Score

- Our team matches our community's face.
- Leadership is shared, not just one in-group.
- Excellent relationship with library leaders
- Board and volunteers treated like employees
- Many different ways to volunteer
- All volunteers go through training.
- Meetings have agendas.
- Friends has an "inclusive" culture.

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## The Basics: What Do You Do?

- **Support the library financially:**
  - Raises "short term" money.
  - Earns financial support: voting!
- **Build support (advocacy):**
  - Promotes library usage.
  - Earns political support: Voting! [Caveat!]
- **Recruit volunteers for the library.**

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

## Typical Mistakes

- Focus on the shortterm: Event-driven only
- Only one person runs the show:
  - Shrinking group of volunteers
- Board "owns" the organization.
  - No clear relationship with library
  - Only about Friends activities
- No strategic plan or big goals
- No evaluation of activity success

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## Recruitment: Attract and Keep

- Core team: Starting leadership group
- The Friends group board members
- Special skills:
  - Finance, marketing
- Volunteer coordinator
- Manage events: People, budgets, time
- Worker bees: Reliable eyes, ears, and hands
- Allies in other organizations

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

Exercise

**Who do you know?  
Who should  
you know?**

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Build Leadership

- Leaders see the big picture.
- Build relationships with other nonprofits.
  - Start with experienced board members.
  - They bring new ideas and contacts.
- Look for community representation.
  - Two people from a cohort.
  - Don't overlook youth!

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Build Your Volunteer Pool

- People want to feel:
  - Validated and important
- Want to use their skills.
- Want to connect others.
- Want to have fun.
- Want to be of service.

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

## Build Your Network

- Leverage resources and audiences
- Not just about the library:
  - Relationship with other nonprofits
  - Literacy, education, arts, cultural
  - Specific populations
- How about:
  - Health, humane, joint fundraisers

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## Caveat

**How well do you know  
your library's finances?  
Financial goals? Overhead?  
Sources of income?**

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

## Different Kinds of Moneys

### • Profits from events and sales:

- Book sales, gift store, branded products
- Pros: Engage community members
- Cons: Low return on higher overhead

### • Individual Donations:

- Fountains, memorials, monthly withdrawals
- Pros: Everyone gets to donate.
- Cons: Low return on low overhead

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## Different Kinds of Moneys

### • Corporate Donations:

- Business partnerships, foundations
- Pros: High-profile credibility
- Cons: High overhead/disconnect

### • Foundations and Agencies

- Targeted and general grants
- Pros: High-profile credibility
- Cons: High overhead/disconnect

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## Different Kinds of Moneys

### • Campaigns:

- Business partnerships, foundations
- Pros: High-profile credibility
- Cons: High overhead/disconnect/expertise

### • Planned giving

- Wills, annuities, stocks, living trusts, land
- Pros: High-profile credibility
- Cons: High overhead/disconnect/expertise

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## Promotions

- Strategic plan sets audiences and priorities.
- Recruit audience members as partners.
- Build organically: one project at a time.
- Big libraries need big plans.
- Who is in charge?
- Align with library's marketing plan.
- Create a calendar of events.

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## Exercise

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**What new events and programs you are planning for the next two years?**

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

## Would These Work?

- Local celebrity reads
- Pet adoptions
- Cooking contests
- Basket/prize auctions
- Run/walk events
- Spelling bees
- International fairs
- DIY/Maker days
- Spring plant sales
- Corporate contests
- Clean-up days
- Joint events
- Health days
- Youth-led events
- Voter drives
- Online book sales

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## Events and Services

- Is it all about books?
- Stores need "retail" manager.
- What engages people:
  - Is it new?
  - Is it participatory?
  - Is it surprising?

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## Community Support

- Friends can do what libraries can't.
- Embedded in other organizations
- Pay for advertising and promotion
- Recruit supporters.
- Connect with specific communities.
- Everyone has a way to contribute.

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# Starting a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

## Resources

- **United for Libraries/ALA**

Association of Library Trustees,  
Advocates, Friends, and Foundations

*[www.ala.org/united/](http://www.ala.org/united/)*

- **Wiley Essential Texts**

Essential Texts for Nonprofit &  
Public Leadership & Management Series

*[www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)*

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