

**Friends of Libraries Supporting Public Libraries – Best Practices and Leadership**  
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**ABSTRACT**

This paper explains the concept of Friends of Library groups and highlights the many services and programs Friends can support and sponsor in their libraries throughout Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. Best practices are demonstrated in advocacy efforts, support of literacy programs, funding for alternative format materials and access technologies for people with disabilities, and sponsorship of aboriginal programming .

Many Friends groups are major contributors to a capital campaign to build a new or renovated library, as demonstrated by the exemplary groups mentioned in this paper.

Key community partnerships can contribute to the success of many Friends groups' efforts and a few are outlined for your consideration. Examples of how Friends may raise funds for their libraries are provided.

Information is included on national Friends associations which provide leadership and support for any library interested in starting Friends of the Library group or for an existing Friends group that requires new ideas or resources.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A Friends of the Library group can be formed in any type of library and the individuals involved in the initial group can determine how they will best support their library. Library Board Trustees, library staff or library volunteers can provide the incentive and do research to assist in the formation of a Friends group. The national Friends' associations listed at the end of this paper are invaluable in assisting Friends groups, those just beginning, as well as those which may have been in existence for many years.

## **BACKGROUND**

Friends of the Library groups have similar mandates, regardless of where in the world they might be, whether they happen to be in a large city or in a small, more rural community. Friends groups exist to support their libraries in the manner the library most needs.

Friends are volunteers who have chosen to give their time and energy to their library. They are usually library patrons, avid readers, and people who believe in learning and literacy. Friends who volunteer for their library in a variety of capacities don't need to be convinced that libraries are extremely important and require appropriate funding. They have received many benefits from being a library user, are already committed to their library, and are willing to work hard to see the library thrive in their community.

Often Friends can be the first point of contact for people new to the community. These people may have heard about the library while the Friends were promoting the library at a book sale outside the library, for example. Friends are truly ambassadors for the library, taking advantage of every opportunity to talk about the importance of specific library services, the availability of public Internet access at the library, or sharing favourite authors, to name only a few real situations.

Friends of the Library are an integral part of the community representing the library's interests. They make valuable connections, work collaboratively with other organizations and are visible and vocal as they advocate for their library. They are great at networking, which is essential during times when libraries or library services are under threat.

## **DEFINING THE ROLE OF FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY**

It is important to establish a collaborative, supportive relationship between the Friends, the Library Director and the Library Board. Library Directors can demonstrate leadership within their libraries and within their local communities by assisting in the development of a Friends of the Library group. They can accomplish this by providing support, keeping the lines of communication open and genuinely appreciating the efforts of their Friends volunteers.

In return, the Friends group will work hard to assist the library in their mission, to advocate for their library and to promote the library.

A Friends of the Library group is a group of people voluntarily associated to assist the library in its work by:

- (i) encouraging communication between the community and the library;
- (ii) promoting use of the library by all groups in the community;
- (iii) enhancing the social, cultural and educational role of the library to users and funders of the library;
- (iv) protecting and encouraging sources of funding
- (v) assisting in developing and maintaining library services for the benefit of all. :<sup>1</sup>

The roles of the Library Director, the Library Board Trustee, Library Staff and the Friends of the Library are distinct. The best definition of these roles is outlined by the Southern Ontario Library Service.<sup>2</sup>

	<b>BOARD</b>	<b>CEO</b>	<b>STAFF</b>	<b>FRIENDS</b>
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To govern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To administer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To implement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support</li> </ul>
Mandate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Libraries Act</li> <li>• Municipal By-law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job description</li> <li>• Mission statement, goals and objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job description</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constitution</li> </ul>
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy &amp; planning</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration</li> <li>• Planning and procedures</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation</li> <li>• Administration as delegated</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Volunteer support</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiscal health of the library</li> <li>• Represent the community</li> <li>• Services that meet the needs of the community</li> <li>• liaison with Council</li> <li>• Securing support for the library from Council and from the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of services</li> <li>• Staffing</li> <li>• Budget monitoring</li> <li>• Representing the library in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of services</li> <li>• Advising CEO on services</li> <li>• Representing the library in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraising campaign</li> <li>• Volunteer hours or scheduling</li> <li>• Speaking out for library services in the community</li> </ul>

	community			
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly meetings</li> <li>• Budget presentation to Council</li> <li>• Development and review of policies and plans</li> <li>• CEO performance appraisal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Board directives</li> <li>• Monitor service delivery through output measures</li> <li>• Supervise staff</li> <li>• Report to Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive procedures</li> <li>• Report to CEO or delegated</li> <li>• Report to Board</li> <li>• Maintain membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and execute fundraising activities</li> <li>• Work as volunteers on specific services</li> </ul>

### WHAT FRIENDS MAY DO FOR THEIR LIBRARY

Friends groups are active in a number of areas. While none of their activities relate to the day-to-day management, operation and governance of the library, a successful Friends group will understand their library’s needs. They undertake activities and projects that are a good match with the services and programs offered by their library.



In meeting the library’s greatest area of need, some Friends groups spend more time advocating; others spend more time raising much needed funds for programs, services, books or other materials or equipment. The range of possible activities is infinite. They relate to the needs of each particular library and to the interests and expertise of the Friends themselves.

"I have come to appreciate the huge contribution which this large and growing organization makes to the Library. They bring incredible enthusiasm, energy and commitment to their activities, and they both reflect and enhance the powerful relationship that Londoners have to our library system."<sup>3</sup>

## ADVOCACY

Friends of Libraries are invaluable advocates when library branches are about to be closed, or if much needed funds might be decreased, instead of increased. They can be the reason libraries are saved or the reason new libraries are built to replace old, outmoded buildings.

Your Friends are very passionate about the intrinsic value of their library. Since Friends are library patrons and have their own important reasons for caring about their library, they have individual and often moving stories to tell about why their library means so much to them.

They are willing to put aside other commitments to give untold hours, often at short notice, to make many phone calls, to write letters and to spread the word that the library needs community advocates to make a difference to the final outcome of budget deliberations. Contact with municipal representatives and letters to the editor of local newspapers will be carefully planned, in consultation with the Library Director and the Library Board.

A well organized, informative advocacy campaign can inform the public about the issues. Friends can often sway public opinion in favour of retaining libraries or library services. With the advent of the Internet and almost instant communication with anyone in your district, no matter how geographically isolated some smaller, outlying communities may be, your Friends volunteers can garner a great deal of support quickly and effectively.

### Best Practices in Advocacy



[www.ottawapubliclibraryfriends.ca/en\\_sos.html](http://www.ottawapubliclibraryfriends.ca/en_sos.html)

#### ◀Ottawa, Ontario

Friends of the Ottawa Public Library

SOS  
“Save Our Services” Campaign

#### Friends of Libraries U.S.A.

Friends can make the difference between a budget increase and a budget cut for their libraries. You can make a long lasting and significant difference for your library through advocacy. ▼



#### Oshawa, Ontario

Phone Campaign – The *Oshawa Friends Advocacy Committee* successfully launched a “flyer and phone campaign” to ask Council to restore the library funding . . . the goal was that each councilor receive 30 phone calls. Well, they got at least 100 phone calls and some received 150. The councilors were impressed because the callers identified themselves as constituents, were courteous, informed and had a simple message, “We want you to restore the library’s funding.” When the vote came, it was 10 – 0 in favour of a nearly 20% increase in the library’s budget. <sup>4</sup>

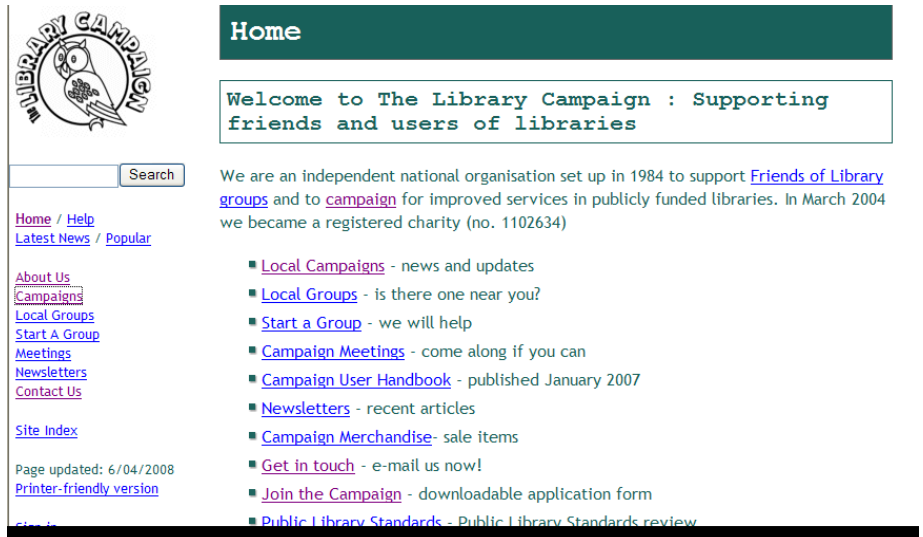
## Atikokan, Ontario

"I cannot imagine a library functioning well without Friends . . . the Municipal Council was shocked when 125 people marched in the Council Chamber, during their regular meeting, to emphasize the importance of the library in the community. It was truly an amazing accomplishment." <sup>5</sup>

"Politically, Friends are very important and effective for libraries of all types. Friends are advocates by default! Friends wouldn't be giving their time, energy and financial support to an entity they're not willing to fight for – that entity is the library. When the case needs to be made for your library, the group most able to step up to the plate is the Friends of the Library." <sup>6</sup>

### The Library Campaign, United Kingdom ▶

. . . an independent, national organisation, set up in 1984 to support Friends of Library groups, and to campaign for improved services in publicly funded libraries.



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Library Campaign. At the top left is a circular logo with an owl and the text 'THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN'. Below the logo is a search bar and a navigation menu with links: Home / Help, Latest News / Popular, About Us, Campaigns, Local Groups, Start A Group, Meetings, Newsletters, Contact Us, and Site Index. The main content area has a green header 'Home' and a welcome message: 'Welcome to The Library Campaign : Supporting friends and users of libraries'. Below this is a paragraph explaining the organization's mission and a list of links: Local Campaigns, Local Groups, Start a Group, Campaign Meetings, Campaign User Handbook, Newsletters, Campaign Merchandise, Get in touch, Join the Campaign, and Public Library Standards.

## LITERACY

Because the majority of people who volunteer with local Friends of the Library groups are “bookish” people who share a common interest in reading, literacy, and books, they are keen to support all types of literacy programs . Some Friends volunteers are retired librarians, teachers, professors and others who have worked in the education field. They believe in the value of lifelong learning.

### Best Practices in Literacy

#### Adopt-a-Library Literacy Program ▶

Friends groups can help to initiate the Adopt-a-Library Literacy Program by proposing and encouraging a partnership between their library and local police agencies. The police act as the "bridge" between the community and the library, helping to develop programs and activities that directly impact literacy among youth.



The banner features the title 'ADOPT-A-LIBRARY LITERACY PROGRAM' in large, bold letters. Below the title is the slogan '... fighting crime one book at a time'. The banner includes a navigation menu with links: Home, Best Practices, About Us, and Contact Us. The main image shows a group of people, including children and police officers, reading books together. The text 'Police Libraries & Kids' is visible on the left side of the banner.

[www.fightingcrime.ca/](http://www.fightingcrime.ca/)

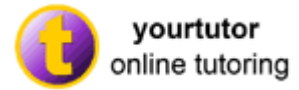
Friends groups routinely support programs that encourage parents to read to their children, or other kinds of early literacy programs. Many times, this support is primarily financial, sponsoring a much needed program. In some communities, the Friends may volunteer to deliver books, tutor in homework clubs, or sponsor prizes in summer reading programs.

Books for babies . . . . Raise a Reader . . . Summer Reading program . . . Tutoring

**BOOKS FOR BABIES**



**TD Summer Reading Club**



**Donations of used books worldwide**



**Friends of the Library BUILDING bridges and making FRIENDS**

Over their 20 years of supporting literacy and library services, the Friends of the Mississauga Public Library have donated gently used library books to agencies in Africa, India, South America, Northern Ontario, Europe and the Philippines.

**Friends in Need**

The FOLUSA website invites anyone to register appeals for donations – both within the U.S.A and internationally. [www.folusa.org](http://www.folusa.org).

[www.mississauga.ca/portal/residents/library](http://www.mississauga.ca/portal/residents/library)



**Bookcrossing**

**The Friends of the Medicine Hat Public Library** in British Columbia use Bookcrossing to promote reading, to encourage people to use their library, and to let people know more about the Friends and the work they do. They “release” books in the downtown area; books which will travel the world and find new readers!

[www.bookcrossing.com/mybookshelf/mhpl](http://www.bookcrossing.com/mybookshelf/mhpl)

**ACCESSIBILITY**

As the Baby Boomer Generation ages, the need for specialized resources, services and equipment increases in public libraries. Many Friends groups raise funds for additional resources to serve seniors or those with special needs.

Friends want to do their part to make sure everyone, including those who are poor or disadvantaged, or who may have a physical or learning disability, has access to library programs and services which will benefit them in their daily lives and make a long-term difference to their future.



## **Best Practices - Accessibility**



**Ajax Public Library** in Ontario - Friends donated shopping baskets to the library to help customers when they browse and also a walker with a basket for the use of those who find it hard to walk.

### **CNIB Visunet Canada Partners Program**

Friends of the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library in Ontario sponsor a special program to increase services provided for individuals unable to read print. Anyone in the community with a print disability may order materials, with the help of a librarian, which will be delivered to their library. Children can have access to more digital (DAISY) books on disc and Print Braille books; adults can read a wider selection of magazines and books on CD and in Braille.



Master Corporal Carson Fiddler, right, watches parachutes drop with military supplies and books at Sandy Lake.

### **Lieutenant Governor's Book Program for Ontario**

◀ Ontario's former Lieutenant Governor, The Hon. James K. Bartleman, launched a program in 2004, to benefit First Nations schools in Ontario's northern communities. Many Friends groups in Ontario helped by donating children's books.

In the first year, an estimated 500,000 books were collected for First Nations Communities. Books were delivered to Ontario Provincial Police stations throughout the province. Military drivers and vehicles collected the books, which were then sorted and driven over 6000 km on winter (ice) roads to remote communities. An annual military convoy was used to fly books to 20 remote communities with no road access.<sup>7</sup>

## **PROGRAMMING**

Friends of the Library lend their expertise and sponsorship to many programs and events that benefit their libraries. Adults and children enjoy programs geared to their interests. Some Friends are interested in local history or genealogy, some promote local authors, and some support book clubs by purchasing their supplies. Often, simple investments like prizes enhance a library contest. Sometimes, Friends serve as judges for short story or poetry contests.



## Best Practices - Programming



The Carnegie Library

◀ The Friends of the Vancouver Public Library in British Columbia sponsored aboriginal writers' workshops to enable them to share their stories at several library branches. The readings gave local and other residents the opportunity to see, hear, and meet established aboriginal writers from various parts of the country, writing in a variety of genres. At the workshops, established writers acted as mentors, inspiration, and guides to many local writers.

friendsofthevpl.ca

### Junior friends – Mississauga, Ontario



Motivate your youngest users to become involved in their community's library. Benefits:

- Public relations
- Fund raising
- Increased volunteerism
- Community involvement
- Focus group/Stakeholder feedback
- Promoting reading and reading development

**JOIN JUNIOR FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY / MISSISSAUGA!**

Junior Friends is a club for children and youth of all ages which helps promote the library in the community.

Please check  New membership or  Annual renewal  
 Single (\$2) or  Family of 3 or more children (\$5)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City /Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ BRANCH: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check *v* off all of the Junior Friends activities you are interested in:  
 Promoting the library by telling people about it  
 Making displays, posters, and decorations for the library  
 Helping with special events and programmes  
 Meeting with other Junior Friends  
 Recommending books to other children  
 Suggesting ideas for the library and our Web site

**NOTE:** Caregiver supervision maybe required for Special Events.

Please return this form and membership fee to the library. Ask staff if you have any questions. Rev. 01/99



### Local Authors

The Dundas Friends of the Library in Ontario introduce local authors and musicians through a program of Sunday afternoon events held in the library.

[www.fodl.org/events.htm](http://www.fodl.org/events.htm)



### Friends of the Lindsay Branch of the City of Kawartha Lakes Public Library Ontario

◀ The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Carnegie Library was an excellent opportunity to showcase the library's long-standing role in the community. ▶



## FUNDRAISING

If libraries require additional funding for specific programs, Friends can step forward and hold a variety of fundraisers. Used book sales are the most popular fundraiser. Merchandise may also be sold, and some Friends groups operate a book store, gift shop, or café in the library.

Friends of the Library are non-profit organizations. Many register as public charities or foundations. Because of their charitable status, they may attract large donations from corporate and private donors. Often, Friends groups are asked to raise funds for a new library or provide furniture and equipment for a new or renovated library.

### **Best Practices - Fundraising**

#### **Capital campaigns for a new library and/or furniture and equipment**



**River John, Nova Scotia**

#### **Friends of the Ajax Public Library**

◀ “A Million Reasons to Smile”, a grassroots campaign to raise \$1 million for the new main branch library in Ajax, Ontario.

Pictured are Val Marshall, Friend and Trustee, and Paul Hamilton, Trustee.

The Friends of the River John Library Society in Nova Scotia were formed in 1999 in order to build the community facility. They built the River John Library and Innovation Centre. The facility is leased back to the municipality to house a public library and to develop community technology opportunities. ▶



#### **Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library, Minnesota, U.S.A.**

◀ “Be Part of the Story,” a \$15 million capital campaign for the new Minneapolis Central Library.

[www.friendsofmpl.org/](http://www.friendsofmpl.org/)



## Friends of the Clark’s Harbour Public Library, Nova Scotia

“The Friends group worked with local organizations to raise nearly \$40,000 . . . this community is battling through hard economic times, low literacy levels and geographic isolation, but the Friends group still managed to raise the money for its library. The Clark's Harbour Friends group conducted various fundraising events and letter-writing campaigns and submitted grant applications to numerous foundations to achieve its goal. The Friends group was creative and inclusive in its activities, holding community teas, bake sales, sweater and quilt draws and auctions,”<sup>8</sup>

### Popular merchandise sold by Friends



Used Books

Friends of the  
Saskatoon  
Public  
Library, Sask.



Book bags

Friends of the  
Library, Lindsay  
Ontario



T-shirts

Friends of the  
London Public  
Library, Ontario



book'mark Library Store

Friends of the Vancouver Public  
Library, British Columbia

### PARTNERSHIPS

Friends of the Library may partner with other organizations in their community. A shared interest in the arts, culture and education, as well as a shared need to raise funds, has resulted in beneficial working relationships between the Friends and community leaders, groups and agencies. Projects may relate to funding, sponsorship, service enhancement, special programming or new resources.

The impact Friends of Library groups have on their community is one of the many reasons Friends are successful in what they do. Their library benefits from the kinds of community outreach their Friends engage in.

### Best Practices - Partnerships





Friends in Sundridge, Ontario used their float to promote their August book sale and solicit book donations.



Friends in Smithers, British Columbia handed out 500 bookmarks and candy as they participated in a community parade.

### Friends of the Warton Branch of the Bruce County Library, Ontario

The library in Warton is now housed in a 3,000 square foot facility, opened in November 2002. The Friends accepted responsibility for furnishing the new library, setting a goal of \$25,000 (which they exceeded).

They used a human chain to move books from the old library to the new facility. ►



## NATIONAL FRIENDS ORGANIZATIONS

Friends of the Library are non-profit, charitable groups formed to support libraries in their specific communities or regions. National associations provide leadership and support for the development of Friends of Library groups and the work they do on behalf of their libraries.



**Friends of Canadian Libraries** - FOCAL provides a national support and resource network to assist in the formation and promotion of Friends of Libraries groups throughout the library community in Canada. Friends of Libraries are volunteers acting collectively and independently to preserve, promote and strengthen library services in harmony with library management and policies.



**Friends of Libraries Australia** -The aim of FOLA is to support the important work being achieved by Friends groups nationally on behalf of libraries and the service they provide, recognizing that libraries have obligations to administrative and funding authorities, as well as to their user community.



**Friends of Libraries U.S.A.**- The mission of FOLUSA is to motivate and support state and local library support groups across the country in their efforts to preserve and strengthen libraries and to create awareness and appreciation of library services.



**The Library Campaign, United Kingdom** - The aim of The Library Campaign is to advance the lifelong education of the public by the promotion, support, assistance and improvement of libraries through the activities of friends and user groups.

Websites of these national associations are resource-rich tools to help members and non-members communicate, network and share expertise. The websites contain newsletters, conference programming, regional meetings and workshops, as well as valuable resources to assist members and non-members in learning how to support libraries. The associations publish newsletters for members, sponsor conference programming, and host regional meetings. Some maintain listservs for members to discuss issues, share news, and network.

## CONCLUSION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, library budgets are being cut, programs are being negatively affected and library branches are under threat of closure. Yet, the value of library services is greater than it has ever been. The need for community based programming with an integrated and inclusive approach is increasing. As libraries develop new programs, use the library setting for innovative community activities and create a more inclusive environment, Friends of the Library groups can enhance and support this new direction.

Your library's Friends care about the library's services and programs, will advocate to keep libraries open, may raise funds tirelessly for a new library, and will support the library in any way they are needed. Every library needs a Friends group; without them, you will not have the community champions every library deserves.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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- Southern Ontario Library Service and dmA Planning & Management Services (2007). *The Library's contribution to your community: a resource manual* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Toronto: SOLS.

## Websites

- Friends of Canadian Libraries: [www.friendsoflibraries.ca](http://www.friendsoflibraries.ca)  
Friends of Libraries Australia - <http://www.fola.org.au/>  
Friends of Libraries U.S.A.: [www.folusa.org](http://www.folusa.org)  
The Library Campaign - <http://www.librarycampaign.co.uk/>

## FOOTNOTES

1. Friends of Libraries resource book. Ed. D. Ferguson. (Tullamarine, Victoria: Friends of Libraries Australia, 2005), 9.
2. Southern Ontario Library Service. Small library kits #10 initiating a friends of the library group. (Toronto: SOLS, 1999), Appendix 1.  
URL: [www.sols.org/publications/kits/smalllibrary/index.htm](http://www.sols.org/publications/kits/smalllibrary/index.htm))
3. Friends of Canadian Libraries “Friends on a mission” Poster presented at the 2004 Canadian Library Association conference, Victoria, Canada, Slide 9.  
URL: [www.accessola.com/focal/Conferences/Canadian%20Library%20Association/CLA-2004/cla-presentation-3/sld001.htm](http://www.accessola.com/focal/Conferences/Canadian%20Library%20Association/CLA-2004/cla-presentation-3/sld001.htm)
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8. Trudy Amirault, Letter to Friends of Canadian Libraries. Feb. 19, 2008.