

Results of the Friends of the Library national survey conducted in 2010 by Counting Opinions Inc. and Friends of Canadian Libraries

by Jami van Haften

Friends of Library groups participated in a national survey related to Friends of Library groups in Canada. Counting Opinions collaborated with Friends of Canadian Libraries (FOCAL) in this initiative. Data was submitted by 121 groups between April and August 2010.

For the first time we collected information about this important voluntary and charitable sector of the library community. We know more now about how Friends groups are organized, their revenue and expenditures, popular fundraising and advocacy activities and their goals and challenges.

Who participated?

We had a 31% response rate, based on our directory which indicated 389 Friends groups at the time of the 2010 survey. Of those who responded, 46% reported they were current or former members of Friends of Canadian Libraries.

Our colleagues at Friends of Libraries U.S.A. (as it was known in 2010) conducted the same survey. Unfortunately they did not have the same participation rate, and as a result we do not have comparative data from that sector to share in this report.

Province	Surveyed	Directory*
Manitoba	1	8
Northwest Territories	1	2
Yukon	1	1
Nova Scotia	2	29
Quebec	4	16
Alberta	20	56
British Columbia	34	90
Ontario	58	174
Total	121	389

*Friends groups listed in the directory on our website www.friendsoflibriares.ca in 2010

About Friends of Library Groups

Most Friends groups in this survey are from the public library sector (98%). Only 14% reported their library also has a foundation. While 57% reported their library is a registered charity, only 4% reported their Friends group is a registered charity.

Friends groups range in size from less than ten members (31%) to greater than ninety-nine (23%). Only one-quarter have a mission statement or job descriptions for members. Only 9% have constitution and bylaws. The executive Committee structure is informal for 1/3 of these groups.

Membership drives are ongoing for 42% of those surveyed, although a surprising 32% report never conducting a membership drive. Since membership ranks second as a source of revenue, and lack of membership is reported as a barrier to success, perhaps this is an area where more attention is due. In-library promotion and word of mouth are the top two methods for member recruitment.

Estimated Revenue

Revenue data provide some interesting trends. The majority (58%) earned \$5,000 or less in 2009. Only eight groups reported earning over \$55,000

Total Estimated Revenue - Distribution

Total Revenue	% of Total
\$0-\$1,000	18%
\$1,010-\$5,000	40%
\$5,010-\$10,000	8%
\$10,001-\$25,000	12%
\$25,010-\$50,000	14%
\$55,010-\$80,000	2%
\$110,000-\$320,000	6%
TOTAL	

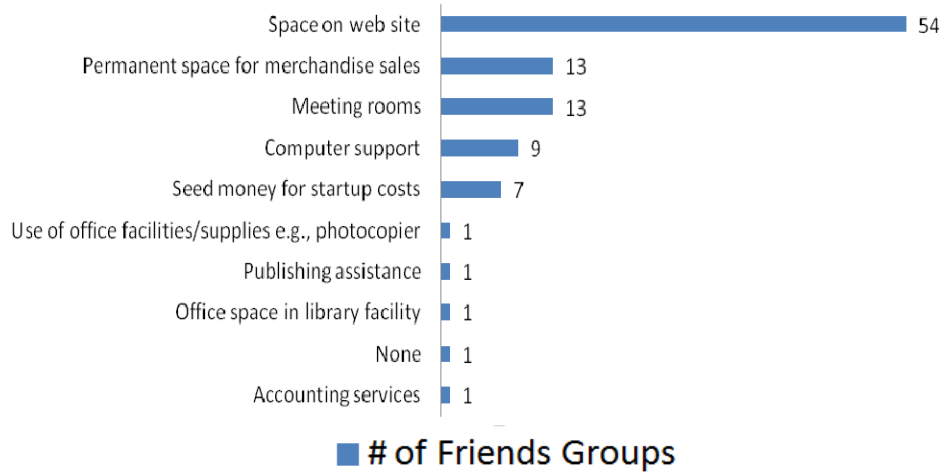
Reported revenue, when compared to group size, reflect the reality that very small groups have astonishing success.

# of members	# of Groups	Estimated revenue
10 or less	31	\$400 - \$40,000
11 – 20	20	\$303 - \$16,000
25 – 90	28	\$500 - \$55,134
Over 100	23	\$500 - \$320,000

*Not all respondents reported revenue data

Relationship with the Library

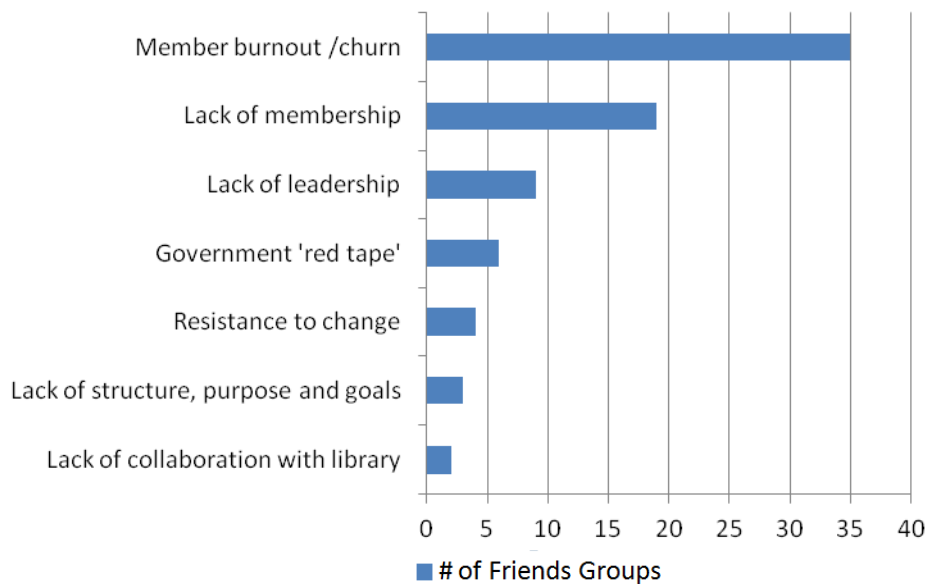
Support from the library comes in many forms ranging from seed money to get started, presence on the library website, use of meeting rooms, space for sales, book storage, and free parking.



The relationship between the Friends and the Library Board appears strong. A member of the Library Board attends Friends meetings and vice versa (21%). The Library director is ex-officio member of Friends Board (15%). Almost half (43%) report a library staff member is dedicated to the Friends group.

Some comments reveal good working relationships, with library staff, director and/or library trustee serving as liaison. Informal discussions take place between the Library Director and the Chair of the Friends, or the Library Director provides written reports, library staff sit on committees, and the President of Friends attends Library Board Meetings to report on activities.

Unfortunately barriers do exist that impact on the success of the Friends group.



Comments provided by respondents reflect issues with both volunteer recruitment, as well as some misunderstanding in terms of the role of Friends in fundraising, and the distinction between the role of the Friends and the role of the Library Board.

Comments:

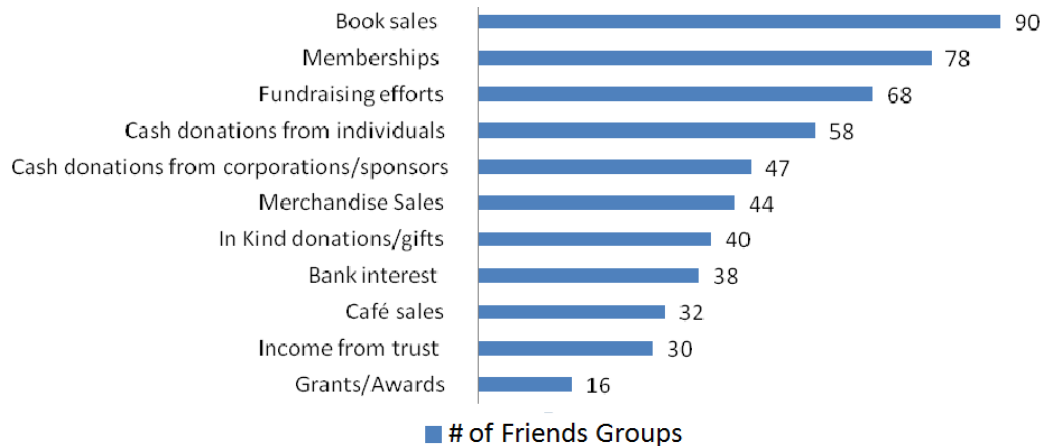
- Although our board members are very active we find it difficult to motivate other non-board members to help out with fundraising
- Friends lost control of book sale revenue which caused relationship with library to fail
- Lack of goals
- Members are the same as the library board members
- Not enough volunteers
- Not enough volunteers above the core group of 6
- Outdated membership list

“Our group is very small and membership is always a challenge for us,” wrote one respondent. “One of the biggest frustrations is that we have little to offer except fundraising for our specific projects, which are all worthy. Not everyone wishes to just attend meetings and fundraise. Most volunteers expect that they will be able to actually assist hands-on with library programmes . . . but the union rules do not allow for this. We find it hard to keep volunteers interested.”

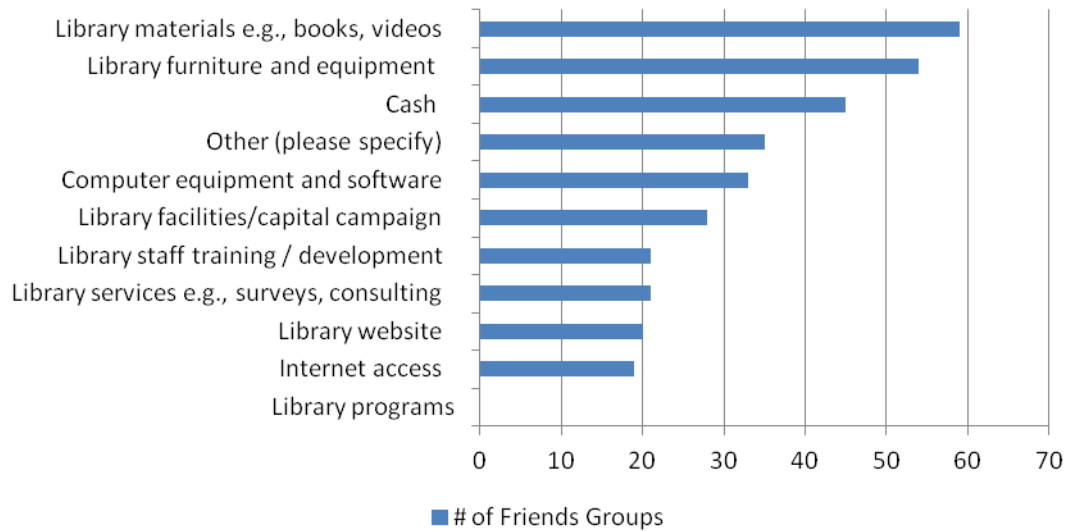
Fundraising

Book sales continue to be by far the most popular fundraising activity performed by Friends. Only 6% reported never having a book sale. Many Friends (14%) operate a book store, while only 2 groups reporting selling books online.

Fundraising activities:

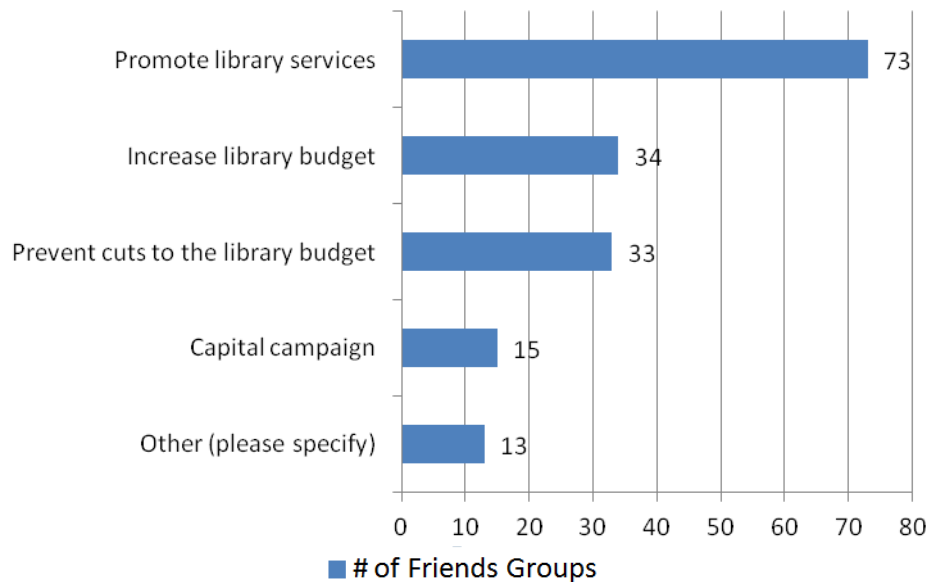


Donations were made to libraries in the following areas:



Advocacy

Local or municipal governments are the focus of advocacy efforts for 43% of those surveyed.



Goals

The top ten goals listed by all groups reflect trends already noted, in that fundraising and advocacy are the highest ranked. Oddly enough, booksales ranked tenth in this list even though that method of fundraising generated the most revenue, and 94% report book selling as an activity.

Fundraise 34

Advocate	18
Facility	16
Programming	14
Awareness	13
Friends	12
Support	10
Promotion	8
Literacy	7
Booksales	6

Observations

Friends of Libraries are making an impact. Our survey demonstrates that a relatively small number of people focussed on fundraising and advocacy provide tremendous benefits for their library. The funding, volunteer service and goodwill generated by Friends of Libraries results in many libraries being able to enhance and expand their collections, facilities and services, and survive threatened budget cuts.

Friends are very good at raising money through used book sales. Many have shared their book sale and book store manuals with FOCAL, and these documents may be found on the FOCAL website (www.friendsoflibraries.ca).

Very few (4%) reported they have registered for charitable status with Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Thus they are unable to attract funding from donors who would expect a charitable tax receipt. In some provinces they would be unable to obtain a license for gaming activities such as raffles, 50/50 draws, bingos, casinos and lotteries.

The 4% figure from our survey seems surprisingly low, as the CRA database contains over 134 Friends of Library listings. Our national listing of Friends groups numbers close to 390, which would suggest 1/3 of Friends groups enjoy charitable status.

Many would benefit from improved structure, beginning with the implementation of a constitution and bylaws to direct the operations of their association. If Friends group register for incorporation, either with the federal or provincial governments, governing documents are needed. A constitution would also be required to register for charitable status. Samples are found on the “Documents” section of the FOCAL website.

While Friends benefit from support from their library, their autonomy from their Library and Library Board needs to be recognized. One group reported the Friends and the Library Board share the same membership. Because Friends groups are often formed by an interested Library Board trustee, it sometimes becomes difficult to separate the two. Their roles need to be clearly delineated, one being governance, and the other being support. Library management, staff and trustees should be non-voting members in attendance at Friends meetings.

A formal executive structure, separate bank account, and job descriptions for volunteers are all signs of a mature organization. Having job descriptions help in recruitment and retention of volunteers, and strengthen growth in membership. A memorandum of understanding would serve to clarify roles and relationships. Only one sample from the Friends of the Ottawa Public Library Association is found on the FOCAL website in the “What Friends Do/Documents” section, but more examples are needed.

Acknowledgement:

This survey would not have been possible without the involvement of Counting Opinions, who generously hosted our survey and shared the results. We also appreciate collaboration with Sally Gardner Reed, Executive Director of the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF) in the development of this survey.

About the author:

Jami van Haaften has served as FOCAL President, Vice-President and Treasurer and remains Webmaster and Editor of the FOCAL POINT newsletter. Friends of Canadian Libraries formed in 1998 to assist in the formation and promotion of Friends of Libraries groups. The FOCAL POINT newsletter, website, Facebook page, and conference programming are methods designed to meet the educational, communication and networking needs of Friends groups across Canada. **Email:** jami.vanhaaften@gmail.com **Website:** www.friendsoflibraries.ca

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