

# 2025 FOML Merit Award Winner

Community under 12,000

## Friends of the Elk Rapids District Library

### ‘Grassroots to Greatness’

#### A Unified Vision for Elk Rapids

In the summer of 2024, the Friends of the Elk Rapids District Library launched a Capital Campaign to fund a new library facility. Under the authorization of the Library Board of Trustees, a multi-sector "Campaign Cabinet" was formed. This coalition included leadership from the Friends, the Elk Rapids Rotary, local business leaders, and foundations. Serving a population of 4,876, the Friends acted as the primary bridge to the community, ensuring both year-round and seasonal residents felt a personal stake in the library's future.



*The campaign made its message personal in small community gatherings.*

#### The Small Gathering Model

To move beyond traditional media, the Friends pioneered a "Grassroots to Greatness" communication strategy. The core of this initiative involved coordinating over 20 intimate gatherings hosted within the homes of Friends members. These sessions provided:

- **Deep-Dive Presentations:** Space for in-depth conversations regarding the long-term impact of a modern library.
- **Culture of Philanthropy:** A platform to foster personal connections and collective community investment.
- **Tangible Results:** These specific home-based gatherings alone generated more than \$366,800 for the building fund.

#### Impact and Financial Stewardship

The 2025 calendar year saw the successful conclusion of Phase 1 of the fundraising efforts. The effectiveness of the involvement of the Friends is evidenced by:

- **Fundraising Milestones:** The acquisition of \$1,017,191.60 in donations and grants during 2025.
- **Organizational Commitment:** A direct contribution of \$100,000 from Friends reserve funds.
- **Leadership Giving:** Contributions totaling \$621,000 from the "Family Division," representing leadership from the Friends Board, Library Board, and staff.
- **Community Mandate:** A 65% millage approval and the mobilization of over 20 individual donors through the Friends' 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsorship.

#### Sustainable Momentum for 2026

This project served as a catalyst for organizational development, significantly expanding the donor database and visibility within the community. As the campaign transitions into Phase 2, focusing on the interior completion of the New Building's Community Room, the focus shifts toward long-term stewardship. The Friends remain dedicated to bridging the gap between campaign donors and lifelong library supporters, ensuring the organization is prepared to meet the increased programming needs of the expanded facility.