



May 2026 FOML Newsletter

President's Letter

Questions. Questions. Questions.

As the president and Consult-A-Friend chairperson for FOML, a lot of questions come across my virtual desk...questions from Friends groups throughout the state who want to know the best and legally acceptable way to do something.

That's certainly understandable since many board members are volunteers who may never have received formal training or experience in nonprofit governance, financial oversight, or organizational policies.

Since an important part of our mission is to help ensure that our member organizations have informed, engaged boards, we will be introducing a regular column in our newsletter called *Board Basics* designed to provide practical, easy-to-understand information on the key responsibilities and tools that can help your Friends' board operate effectively and responsibly.

We will explore topics such as insurance coverage, bylaws, financial controls, board member responsibilities, meeting procedures, fundraising policies, succession planning, and other essentials, starting with Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) in this issue. Whether your organization is newly formed or well established, this series aims to offer useful guidance, helpful reminders, and resources that can strengthen boards and support the important work they do in their communities.

Some of your questions are fairly straightforward and reasonably easy to answer. But many are nuanced and depend on the specific circumstances of the organization asking the question. *Board Basics* will try to focus on best practices and information that is generally applicable to all Friends groups. And, for

questions that fall more into the "gray" area that have answers dependent on the circumstances of your particular group, you can continue to tap into our *Consult-A-Friend* service.

Board Basics will address your insurance questions in the August edition of the "Focus on Friends" newsletter. So, if you have any specific insurance-related questions send them to us at [this address](#).

Meanwhile, this edition includes some great information on the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by Clare Membiela, Library Law Consultant for the Library of Michigan.

Hope you enjoy this edition and can mine something from it to bring to your group.

Annual Membership Meeting Focuses on 'Building Bridges' and Resources for Friends



The 2026 Friends of Michigan Libraries Annual Membership Meeting was held at Delta Township District Library in Lansing, MI on April 10, 2026. Forty-one members met from 22 Michigan Libraries to share their experiences and learn what other Friends groups are doing.

FOML President Joe David shared the year-in-review, highlighting financial results and membership numbers and spoke about the new services available through the website.

He announced the 2025 Merit Award winners:

- **Friends of the Elk Rapids District Library** for its very successful millage project, "[Grassroots to Greatness](#)."
- **Friends of the Cadillac-Wexford Public Library** for its amazing "[Book Fest](#)" bringing together 350 people to meet 46 Michigan authors.

Steven Bowers, Executive Director of The Library Network, served as the keynote speaker. His topic was "Unity: Moving Forward Together in Service." He shared the vast number of resources available to Friends groups during his presentation. His slides are on the website for members to [review](#).



FOML board members and attendees are seen here at the annual meeting.

Annual Meeting - Continued on page 3

Annual Meeting, from page 2

Lunch was followed by a Panel Discussion: “Building Bridges: Effective Collaboration Between Library Directors and Friends Groups,” with President David serving as moderator. Panelists (pictured below from left to right) included:

- Maria McCarville, Director, Warren Public Library
- Clare Membiela, Library Law Consultant, Library of Michigan
- Linda David, Kent District Library Friends Treasurer
- Sue Johnson, FOML Treasurer and President of the Novi Friends

The discussion can be viewed on our [YouTube channel](#). The video has been edited for length and relevance.

There are several keys to a successful relationship between a library director and a Friends group. A **Memorandum of Understanding** is an excellent starting place by defining the relationship. See more on page 10, in our new feature **Board Basics**.

The afternoon was completed with a **Table Talk** session where Friends got to exchange ideas. Some takeaways from the sessions included

- Everyone sees the value in younger members who may bring a new perspective.
- Recruit members through book clubs, have a “member spotlight” in your newsletter, and be sure that members feel valued.
- Market your group as “the place to be.” Make sure your atmosphere is positive and that members’ ideas are encouraged.

Photos below: At left, President Joe David chatting with attendees during Table Talk. At right, guest speaker Steven Bowers, continuing to share with participants at lunchtime.



Talk About Friends Workshop Shares Tips on Planning and Executing a Millage Campaign

FOML's "Talk About Friends" workshop was held on May 8 at the Cascade Branch of the Kent District Library (KDL), focusing on how to conduct a successful library millage campaign and featuring Randy Goble, Director of Engagement for KDL, as the keynote speaker.

Goble's presentation covered a spectrum of millage-related topics, including the planning and marketing of a campaign and legal compliance requirements facing libraries, Ballot Question Committees, and Friends.

A question and answer session followed his presentation, covering a variety of topics such as timing issues, market research, social media management, building community relationships, and collaboration between different entities involved in campaigns.

You can view the introduction, presentation and Q&A [here](https://foml.org/workshop-presentations/). Some of the key points made during the presentation include: <https://foml.org/workshop-presentations/>

- The importance of transparency, personalization, and early engagement in marketing;
- The need to practice storytelling that will resonate more than pure facts and logic;
- The need for careful compliance with campaign finance laws to avoid reputational risk and the potential loss of tax-free status with the IRS; and
- The need to be visible at community events and not rely only on mass communications.

The millage discussion and the ensuing "Table Talk" sessions received very high marks by those in attendance, which included both library staff and members of Friends groups. The following were common observations:

- "The millage information was very helpful. Randy was a wealth of information."
- "I really appreciated Randy Goble's presentation. It was extremely informative."
- "As a library staff member, the millage presentation was most valuable to me."
- "The best part is the sharing of ideas and interacting with others."
- "It was an excellent overview of what to consider when getting ready for a millage."



Pictured (from left to right) from the Dewitt Library are Tina Brander, Lynette Davison, Melany Mack, and Deb Blake.

Millage presentation - Continued on page 5

Millage presentation, *continued from page 4*

“It was obvious by the level of audience participation and variety of questions that there was something of value in Randy’s presentation for everyone,” said Joe David, FOML President. “Having successfully navigated a library millage campaign recently for KDL, he was able to share hands-on experiences that brought to life abstract principles one might find in a textbook.

“I highly recommend that anyone facing a millage campaign take some time to [view the video](#) of Randy’s presentation and Q&A session. You can fast-forward through the introduction,” he added.

Talk About Friends

Plan now to join us for “Talk About Friends” at the Shelby Area District Library and the Novi Public Library, planned for September 25. Registration information will be available on the website in the next few weeks and also emailed to FOML members.

For your Calendar

- June 25 - 29 ALA Annual Conference & Exhibitions, Chicago
- September 25 “Talk About Friends” at Shelby Area Library & Novi Public Library
- September 30 Deadline for applications for Harriet Larson Founders Grant Award
- October 18 - 24 National Friends of Libraries Week
- October 28 - 30 MLA Annual Conference, Suburban Collection Showplace, Novi

Summertime and Your Friends’ Group

When the kids are out of school, and the community pool beckons, life still goes on at your local library - and with your Friends’ organization.

Now is the time to

- **Plan your calendar for fall:** regular meetings, attendance at Library Trustee meetings, book sales, fundraisers, special events.
- **Review your Friends committees:** finance, membership, events, communications, book sales, nominations. Update committee goals, tasks, timelines.
- **Volunteers:** recruitment, training, retention, and recognition.
- **Digital Cleanup:** your database of members should be up to date, but check for duplicates, address and email changes, deletions.
- **Physical Cleanup:** your file cabinets or spaces at the library.

Grants & Awards

2026 Harriet Larson Grant to Friends of the Laingsburg Public Library

The Friends of the Laingsburg Public Library are the recipients of the 2026 Harriet Larson Grant, which is awarded to a Friends group that is either in the process of getting started or revitalizing their organization. (Photo at right: Laingsburg Public Library.)

The Laingsburg Friends were quietly operating before the combination of a creative new library director and several new board members led to a new era of organizational effort in September of 2025, according to Lori Johnson, Laingsburg Friends president.

“The pause, rather than weakening the organization, seems to have given it space to reflect, regroup and return stronger than before,” she said. “There’s a shared excitement in the air—a feeling that isn’t just a continuation but a revitalized beginning.”

She added that the library’s resurgence has been fueled by the emergence of a wide variety of innovative programs, engaging events, and valued services that are attracting visitors who may not have entered the library in years.

“What once felt still has become vibrant again, as the library transforms into a lively hub of curiosity, connection, and possibility,” she said.

Funds from the Harriet Larson Grant will allow the Friends to host an open house designed to attract more people in the community into the library space, showcase available services, and highlight new or expanded programs.

“It will provide an inviting opportunity for visitors to explore resources, meet staff and volunteers, and experience how the library supports learning, creativity and connectivity,” Johnson said. “The open house will strengthen community relationships and encourage both increased memberships and ongoing engagement.”

The Friends of Michigan Libraries President Joe David congratulated the Laingsburg Friends “on the energy, vision and determination that are evident in their efforts to reaffirm and deliver on its library’s commitment to their community.”



A front view of the Laingsburg Public Library is seen here.

Tips for Success

Can Your Group Encourage the Community to Lobby Government Officials?

We recently received the following question from one of our member Friends groups through our Consult-A-Friend program:

“Our board is considering providing community members with documentation encouraging them to reach out to their township officials in writing (using a template letter that has been drafted) or by attending township meetings to share the value of the library and to influence township decision makers to increase library funding. Is this an acceptable and legal practice that Friends can pursue?”

The simple answer to that question is yes, a 501(C)3 can provide “community members with documentation encouraging them to reach out to their township official in writing...or by attending township meetings to share the value of the library and to influence township decision makers to increase library funding.”



This is considered “grassroots lobbying” and is permissible by the IRS, as long as it is not a “substantial” part of what your organization does as a whole. Something like this is considered “nonpartisan” since it is not officially tied to any political party. So, you are permitted to encourage a specific course of action, as long as it is not an endorsement of a political candidate.

In fact, almost by definition, Friends groups exist to advocate for their libraries, whether it be through fundraising, hosting special events or simply getting the word out to influencers that the library needs their support. So, actively encouraging others to speak out on behalf of the library is in your job description.

Just keep in mind that your tax-exempt status can be put at risk if you are investing a “significant” portion of your organization’s resources (time and money) in lobbying activities, which is generally not the case for typical Friends groups.

Friendeavors

‘Battle of the Books’ Brings Kids and Families Together in Competitive Games at the Library

Editor’s Note: Friendeavors features efforts by Friends groups to make a difference by raising funds or by hosting events to bring members of the community together. In addition to possible inclusion in our newsletter, all these activities are also posted on our website.

If you’re old enough to remember the early *College Bowl* telecasts from the 1950s or an updated version hosted on NBC by Peyton Manning, then you have a pretty good idea what the annual *Battle of the Books* competition is at the Cascade Branch of the Kent District Library.

It’s an opportunity for kids with skills outside the athletic arena to put their reading skills to the test in friendly competition with other teams of students by answering questions in a timed and judged event at the library.



The “Battle” has grown in popularity over the years, with 22 four-person teams sparring this year for gift cards and the right to display the championship trophy in their school, according to Lulu Brown, branch director.

“We register the four-person teams a couple weeks before the event, go into the classrooms to explain it and build excitement, and share four book titles that we will draw questions from,” she explained. “Each team must have an adult coach.”

Excitement and anticipation build in the ensuing weeks as the kids choose team

names and plan how to decorate their tables. Prizes are awarded for the best table decoration, and each participant receives a certificate to commemorate the event.

Brown said that the energy in the room at this year’s “Battle” was remarkable, as students cheered enthusiastically for correct answers, creating an atmosphere that felt as exciting as a championship sporting event.

“It’s not just about the kids, though,” she explained. “Families

came out in strong support to encourage their young readers. One of the most rewarding aspects of the evening was seeing entire families engaged in the challenge, with parents quietly thinking through the questions alongside the students.”

Programs like “Battle of the Books” highlight the library’s commitment to making learning fun and engaging for young readers while fostering a love of reading that extends beyond the program itself. The event also reflects the strong partnership between the library, Friends of the Library, local schools, and families who support literacy and learning in our community.

Follow FOML on Facebook

Like Us at [FOMLibraries](#)

The FOML Facebook page has really grown, with nearly 900 followers, an increase of 20% since FOML began tracking data in December 2024.

Recent posts that have garnered a lot of attention include Michigan Notable Author highlights, posts welcoming new and returning members, posts recognizing Friends' achievements, and photos at FOML meetings.



So, why “like” the FOML account?

Because, it's a “win-win!”

The FOML Facebook page contains a variety of information. For example, it lets you know what other Friends are doing throughout the State. Like this one for the Escanaba Public Library!



Posts remind you to apply for grants, awards, and scholarships, and also highlight national library and book holidays. And, the FOML Facebook page helps to keep you up-to-date on government policies affecting libraries.

Our FOML Facebook managers, Cindy McKinnon (Friends of the Shelby Area District Library) and Kelly O'Leary (Friends of the Portage Library) faithfully check out the Friends' pages of our FOML members and share your posts!

Since Cindy and Kelly may miss posts that FOML members would like to see garner a more widespread audience than just the audience on their own Facebook pages, please help them out and invite them to share the post. Cindy and Kelly can't promise to repost all of them, but it will help them know what is important to your Friends' group. If you have ideas for posts or want help spreading the word about your own Friends group's activities, [email them!](#)

Keep engaging with our Facebook page. We love to receive "Likes"!

Board Basics

Building Strong Partnerships: Why Libraries and Friends Groups Use MOUs

At FOML's recent Annual Membership meeting in April, the subject of **Memos of Understanding**, commonly called an MOU, came up, and several of those in attendance were unfamiliar with the term. You can find a [sample MOU](#) on the ALA website.

Clare Membiela, an attorney who is the Library Law Consultant for the Library of Michigan and also an advisor to our FOML Board, prepared a detailed document on the subject. A brief introduction from the FOML newsletter editor, Vicki Granger, appears below. We encourage you to read the [full article](#) by Clare on our website.

A Framework for Collaboration, Not Conflict A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a written document that defines how two organizations will work together. For public libraries and Friends groups, it serves as a practical tool for aligning expectations while preserving each organization's independence.

Although MOUs often resemble contracts, they are typically designed as nonbinding agreements. Instead, they function as structured "handshake agreements" that help guide collaboration and reduce misunderstandings.

Why Libraries and Friends Groups Need Structure Libraries and Friends groups often share a close working relationship—but legally, they are very different organizations. Libraries are public government entities. Friends groups are private nonprofit organizations, often tax-exempt under IRS 501(c)(3).

Because of these differences, each group follows different financial rules, governance structures, and transparency requirements. An MOU helps clarify how those systems interact.

What an MOU Can Clarify Some examples include fundraising roles (book sales, campaigns, events), use of library facilities and equipment, volunteer expectations and supervision, ownership and handling of donated materials, communication between boards and leadership, insurance and liability responsibilities.

Benefits of an MOU When done well, an MOU can reduce confusion and conflict, strengthen donor trust, provide consistency through leadership changes, clarify financial and operational expectations, and support long-term strategic planning.

The Bottom Line An MOU is **not about restricting collaboration-it is about strengthening it**. When libraries and Friends groups clearly define how they work together, they free themselves to focus on what matters most: supporting the library's mission and serving the community.



Friends of Michigan Libraries

Connecting Friends across Michigan

FOML Board of Directors

- President Joe David (Friends of the Cascade Library)
- Vice-President Debra Friedman (Friends of the Crawford County Library)
- Treasurer Sue Johnson (Friends of the Novi Public Library)
- Secretary Vicki Granger (Friends of the Grosse Pointe Public Library)
- Director Merry Baxter (Friends of the Petoskey Public Library)
- Director Cindy Bily (Friends of the Adrian District Library)
- Director Julie Boylan (Friends of the Flint Public Library)
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- Director Gerald Furi (Farmington Community Library)
- Director Steve Hall (Friends of the Charlevoix Public Library)
- Director Charles Hanson (ALA/United for Libraries representative)
- Director Maria McCarville (Warren Public Library)
- Director Cindy McKinnon (Friends of the Shelby Area District Library)
- Director Kelly O'Leary (Friends of the Portage District Library)

FOML Board of Advisors

Bryonna Barton (Eaton Rapids District Library), Jennifer Anne Kundak (Chelsea District Library), Clare Membiela (Library of Michigan), Karren Reish (Library of Michigan), Paul Snyder (Commerce Township Community Library), Jill Sodt (Mott Community College Library)

Contact Us:

For **general business communications**

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Submit a **Feedback Forum** request

foml.feedbackforum@gmail.com

Submit a **Friendeavors** article

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