

WHY HAVE A NEWSLETTER?

This is a great way to keep members informed about events and what is going on in their museum as well as further afield. The newsletter can be very attractive and is an essential tool for spreading the word about how Friends money is being spent. Acquisition news is always received well.

The publication hopefully makes them feel part of a group with a common interest and encourages them to renew their membership. For a Friends group where no entry fees are charged by 'their' museum the newsletter will be the main benefit they see for their subscription. Thus the newsletter becomes of greater importance and should aim to introduce the group to their committee and inform them of Friends events and also keep them well informed about changes and events at their museum.

WHAT WILL IT COST?

Get at least three quotes from printers in your area. Remember that everything the Friends produce should be a credit to their museum and enhance its reputation. It is very important to share publication dates with your museum well in advance as this can cut down costs for both parties. Getting to know your printer can be extremely valuable, especially if you can find someone who is sympathetic to the museum and Friends world.

A distinctive and recognisable style is very important – and this needs hammering out with a printer so that you will have some idea of the cost before you get into discussions about how elaborate/glossy you can realistically provide. Otherwise you are at the risk that your Friends may have grander ideas than you can actually afford. Find out what other groups of similar size do. E-mail is a wonderful tool to help cut down the number of visits made to the printers.

Postage is an important issue and so you need to calculate whether you are likely to be adding other documents, leaflets or whatever and allow some leeway for the postal bracket you intend to occupy.

Dulwich and Bristol Friends have a hand delivery rota to cut down on postal costs. They set aside newsletters for all members who live out of the area and then create 'delivery areas' for the others. These are small and often of only a few streets which makes it easier to persuade a committee / ordinary member to take on the delivery. The fact that it is only two, three or four times a year helps too. Although this scheme is used by some of our larger groups, saving a great deal of money, it can be a life-saver for small groups, which, with only one or two professional staff in their museum, have few, if any mailings other than the Friends' newsletter. The actual packing of newsletters by volunteers can be a sociable occasion and also makes Friends feel useful, especially those who are less fit and capable of more active volunteer work.

In the future e-mail subscription to newsletters might be a choice although older style museums and older members will still prefer paper editions for a few years yet. However there may be a case for offering e-mail subscriptions for newsletters and offering a slightly reduced subscription to members who would be happy to receive an electronic copy.

Do not be too ambitious to start with and aim for quality rather than quantity in the initial stages. Remember that BAFM can supply examples or put you in touch with similar organisations to your own. 'Size matters' If newsletters are to be posted, the most advantageous and cost effective size is A5.

WHEN SHOULD IT BE SENT OUT?

This is a decision for individual groups but sending out information about events needs to be taken into consideration. Fit in with museum mailings, combining publicity for exhibitions and events. Share publication dates well in advance and ask if they want to include extra relevant information. Sometimes museums and Friends can share the postage costs. Members should feel that they are first to be invited to a preview or hear about new developments at their museum.

Some groups have Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter newsletters; others go for twice a year. If they can be added to a museum/Friends website then there should be a period of about one month where members still have the latest newsletter before it is posted on the web for anyone to read.

WHO ELSE SHOULD RECEIVE IT?

The Trustees, the director and staff of the museum you are attached to. Draw up a mailing list of local press, councillors and MP's. Some groups mail schools and colleges. Send to other local societies with common interests.

Put copies out in the museum at the Friends desk or information desk or in the shop or café for the general public to pick up. They should be free if possible but encourage a donation if your museum agrees with this. Also it is extremely important that these 'free' copies include a clear definition of the benefits of belonging to a Friends group so that there is still an incentive to join.

The BAFM Journal Editor, BAFM Home News Editor and your BAFM Area Coordinator Contact details are in the BAFM Journal.

WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NEWSLETTER?

Advertise for a volunteer with good IT skills or someone who is willing to learn and remember that he/she will need a supportive committee. A couple of Friends or a small sub-committee may like to share the work.

The Editor should meet with his/ her Chair of Friends to approve what is to be included and also proof read the final copy prior to sending it to the printer.

Do not forget to number each edition and keep an archive of all your newsletters.

Encourage Friends to comment and contribute. Eg Write a piece about a recent event that the Friends have enjoyed and make sure that there are images included to make the article more attractive.

Make the most of your BAFM membership and quote from the BAFM Journal, with acknowledgement.