

SURVEY OF FRIENDS OF THE NLA MEMBERS 2023: OUTCOMES

In response to our invitation in February 2023 for Friends to ‘Tell us what you think!’ of the Friends activities—membership offerings, events and communications—we received 258 responses to the online survey.

The key outcomes are summarised below:

- Reasons for joining the Friends
- Role of the Friends
- Membership benefits
- Communications
- Events

A range of comments under each heading are included. However, a number of the comments indicate that the separate roles of the Friends and the NLA are not always clearly understood. Suggestions for events and activities such as how to use the collections and Trove; NLA tours; curators/experts talks; and regular children’s story times fall outside the Friends purview. However, we have passed on your feedback to the NLA management for their consideration.

Reasons for joining the Friends

- Supporting the work of the NLA was the most common reason
- Discounts at the NLA Bookshop and Bookplate, receiving communications from the Friends and attending Friends events were other popular reasons
- Comments included support for Canberra’s cultural institutions, giving back to a worthy institution, using the NLA facilities, the quiet space, accessing Trove and, from interstate respondents, online events

Role of the Friends

Multiple comments were:

- Supporting the NLA, promoting recognition of its work, building a network of supporters, advocacy and lobbying
- Promoting and conducting events (literary and social) and talks—seen as engaging members with the NLA and providing a community of like-minded people
- Organising and returning to more frequent events as available pre-Covid lockdown
- Providing the Friends Lounge and rewarding members with discounts at the NLA Bookshop and Bookplate
- A sounding board for the Director and NLA engagement and activities, financial support
- Supporting various artists in all fields by promoting their work, fundraising for fellowships
- Regular communications to keep interstate members informed
- Increasing the collections, fostering communities to share their stories, providing assistance to source records
- Providing newspapers, magazines and a better book range in the Friends Lounge

Membership benefits

- NLA Bookshop and Bookplate benefits were utilised by 33% and 25% of respondents in the last 12 months
- Some 18% had attended events and 13% accessed the Friends Lounge
- A small number had enjoyed reciprocal benefits at interstate cultural institutions
- A small number reported not having accessed any benefits
- When asked to select the three membership benefits they most valued, supporting the work of the NLA was most frequently mentioned, closely followed by NLA Bookshop discounts
- The key communications with members—the quarterly newsletter and Weekly eNews—and availability of events were also highly valued (see below)

Communications

- The Weekly eNews was rated 'great' by 42% and 'mostly good' by 51%; the quarterly newsletter 'great' by 44% and 'mostly good' by 51%
- 3.5% and 2.4% respectively recorded 'could be improved; and 3% and 2% said they rarely read them
- The frequency of delivery of the Weekly eNews is 'about right' according to 78% of respondents, with 20% reporting them as 'too frequent'
- The quarterly newsletter frequency is considered 'about right' by 90% of respondents with the remainder split between regarding them as 'too frequent' or wanting 'to see more'
- Comments on the Weekly eNews included regular, succinct information appreciated, more information about events, especially author talks, fortnightly, more on reciprocal benefits, a regular (weekly) Trove tip
- Comments on the quarterly newsletter included always so interesting and informative, provide interesting background on exhibitions and collections that are not well known, well researched and written, more about special collections and NLA publications, more features on various, including small, collections, review occasionally of a rare book, more articles on recent acquisitions
- General comments included quality of content varied and relevant, living [outside Canberra], keeps me in touch with the NLA, input into exhibition programming through surveys, request to simplify how to join the Friends and offering a QR code, not aware of reciprocal benefits with other organisations, bring back the NLA magazine

Events

- Interest was evenly spread across lectures and panel discussions, exclusive exhibition previews, Meet the Author presentations, special collection viewings (White Gloves), Coffee with the Curator and online events
- Support for more author events—both online and in-person—were commented on by many respondents as were social events with refreshments giving members the opportunity to mingle
- More time for questions at events

- Interest in hands-on workshops, book clubs (on-site and online), information sessions on specific research topics were noted by some
- The timing of events—during the day and evening—were both the subject of pros and cons, depending on the circumstances of individual members
- Events themed to current and specific issues eg The Voice, Indigenous Collection, the Asian Collection, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, Maps Collection, Art Collection, anniversaries of national and historical events, curator-led talks
- Monthly Friends coffee mornings or breakfasts
- Events and exhibitions in collaboration with other libraries and organisations
- Exclusive Friends shopping nights

What happens next?

- The survey has provided very useful material for the Friends Committee and the Friends Office to plan activities that will be of most interest to current members and to attract new members
- Planning for the Friends events program will be guided by the suggestions received in the survey; the types and dates of events need to be planned well in advance
- Content suggestions for the two key Friends communications are being taken into account for coming issues
- The need to better promote and encourage use of the Friends Lounge and the availability of reciprocal benefits with other organisations will be addressed
- The suggestion for a QR code on the Friends membership benefits letter that links directly to the benefits page on our website has been actioned
- While many suggestions are outside what the Friends can do under our Charter, we will continue to encourage Friends to enjoy NLA-conducted events and support on how to use the NLA's facilities and collections and to participate in the NLA volunteer-led tours of the Library

The Friends of the NLA Committee would like to give a big thank to the Friends Executive Officer Lauren Conron for her work in devising the survey and collating the results.

And thank you to the Friends members who responded to the survey and gave us such valuable feedback. We always welcome your ideas and thoughts on the activities of the Friends.

Please feel free to email the Friends Office or the Friends Committee at friends@nla.gov.au