



The Trailblazer Project

Goal: To develop and implement innovative strategies for global Friendship Force growth.

Concept: A trailblazer is a pioneer, an explorer, a leader, and an innovator. As we look toward the future, we see that the Friendship Force needs volunteers to take on these exciting and challenging roles, to develop new strategies to help our organization grow and thrive. Clubs selected to take on a Trailblazer project will make a multi-year commitment to explore, lead and innovate with a pioneering spirit, to create new ideas for growth for the Friendship Force. The results of the Trailblazer Project will be shared with all Friendship Force clubs, providing valuable models for future growth throughout our global network.

Project Description: Each Trailblazer project will include an innovative action plan that can lead to significant growth and that can be shared with other clubs. Clubs interested in taking on a Trailblazer project will submit a project proposal to FFI. If the proposal is accepted, FFI will work with the club to establish an individualized timeline for putting the project into action. The progress of the project will be recorded regularly. The results of the project must be documented through reports, statistics, media attention, photographs and/or written accounts. The end result will be a proven growth strategy that serves as a model for other clubs. (Proposals from individuals for global or regional initiatives based on web communications and/or social media will also be considered.)

Clubs interested in participating may submit a Trailblazer project proposal based on one or more of the following:

1. Themed and global exchanges: One of the best ways to expand the Friendship Force is by developing exchange themes for outbound and inbound exchanges that will attract new participants. To be considered for a Trailblazer project, exchanges should be in addition to the club's regular assignments and include a specific strategy for gaining new ambassadors and/or hosts.
2. Community outreach: Growth can be enhanced by raising the visibility of the Friendship Force in the local community. This can include partnerships with other organizations, local programs and service projects that promote the Friendship Force mission in the community, as well as through traditional or online media and public relations.
3. Club Mentoring: A strong club may contribute to Friendship Force growth by developing or mentoring other clubs—either in the region or in another region of the world. In this case, a club may propose multi-year projects aimed at providing exchange and organizational support to assist another club's development. A variation on this theme could be a regional project with one club taking a leadership role in guiding a group of clubs in a coordinated growth strategy.
4. Membership Growth: New strategies are needed for attracting the “next generation” of members and leaders to Friendship Force clubs. Membership projects should have specific growth goals that include developing a younger and more diverse membership base for the future.

5. Other: Clubs are encouraged to be creative. Projects that combine elements of the above themes or have an entirely different approach are welcome. They should, however, be projects that, if successful, can be used by other clubs.

Application Process: Any Friendship Force club may submit an application to FFI for a Trailblazer project. Proposals will be evaluated on their ability to create significant new growth for the sponsoring club, as well as their relevance as new models for growth that can be followed by other clubs in the future. Success will require strong project leadership, support by the club and sufficient resources. Projects should be designed to begin in 2011 and last 2-3 years. Most of the financial resources needed to complete the project should come from club resources (existing or raised specifically for this project). In addition, matching Trailblazer grants may be requested from FFI. (The club would be expected to contribute at least as much as is being requested from FFI.) For assistance in completing the application or to discuss potential trailblazer projects, please contact George Brown (gbrown@thefriendshipforce.org) or Debbie Powell (dpowell@thefriendshipforce.org).

The application should include the following information and be sent via email attachment directly to Debbie Powell (dpowell@thefriendshipforce.org):

1. Project Description:
 - a. What is the proposed project?
 - b. How is the project innovative and growth-oriented?
 - c. How will success be measured? (measurable goals and outcomes)
 - d. How can the project be used as a model for other clubs?
2. Resource requirements:
 - a. What is the general budget for the project?
 - b. How will the club support the project financially?
 - c. What outside financial support will be required from the local community, and how will it be obtained?
 - d. Will matching funds be requested from FFI?
3. Project leadership:
 - a. Who will serve as the Trailblazer Coordinator? Provide a brief biographical summary.
 - b. What other club and/or community leadership will be used?
4. Club endorsement:
 - a. Include a statement of support from the club board.
 - b. The application should be signed by the club president and submitted via email attachment to dpowell@thefriendshipforce.org.

Applications will be reviewed as they are received – there is no deadline. FFI will process applications quickly, accepting as many as it can support that are truly innovative and growth-oriented. Once a project has been approved, FFI will work closely with the club's Trailblazer coordinator to ensure the highest possible results. In addition, the various Trailblazer coordinators will be able to share information with each other as their projects are developed. This will be done via email and internet conferencing arranged by FFI.



Trailblazer Project Ideas

Examples of Possible Trailblazer Projects

Clubs are invited to use their imagination in developing Trailblazer Projects that lead to growth. To get you started in your thinking, we've listed a few ideas below. Feel free to pursue the ones presented here or to develop your own way of expanding the Friendship Force. If you need help, let us know. We have staff as well as experienced Friendship Force volunteers who are available to help you develop your project.

1. Exchanges: You are invited to request new exchange(s) as your Trailblazer Project. These should be in addition to your regular assignment, designed to expand the Friendship Force in your region. Here are some examples:

a) Develop an inbound global exchange that features unique cultural aspects of your region. FFI would work with the club to design a strong promotional campaign for recruiting applicants from around the world. Your ED would select the ambassadors as well as the hosts.

b) Create a special outbound exchange that either challenges your experienced members to do something new (unusual destination or theme) OR that is designed specifically for new and younger members. FFI has destinations available suitable for either purpose. One idea is to offer an exchange exclusively for younger (working-age) ambassadors. FFI would work with the club to match them with hosts of a similar age.

c) Sponsor a teacher exchange, accepting an inbound exchange of teachers and introducing them to the education community in your region. This can be followed with an outbound exchange of teachers.

d) Design a themed exchange, inbound or outbound, that will attract new and younger participants.

e) Expand hosting capacity. A Trailblazer Project might develop new approaches to recruiting and using hosts. This would include the kind of materials needed to make hosting attractive to newcomers, as well as a wide variety of hosting assignments. In addition to the traditional 7-night homestay and day hosting, you might consider additional patterns, such as: (1) shared hosting, where several hosts work together to provide the hosting for the ambassadors; (2) split hosting, assigning two hosts who divide the week, or (3) the buddy system, with a new member assigned as the host with close support by an experienced host.

2. Community Outreach: Your project may involve developing new relationships and partnerships with organizations in the community that are related to the mission of the Friendship Force. Sister Cities, International Visitor Centers, World Affairs Councils, International student programs...these are just a few examples of groups you can work with. A community outreach project would be designed to create or expand your association with one or more of these groups so that your members are more active in the community and so that the members of other organizations learn how they can participate in Friendship Force activities. Community outreach can also include working with the media to make the Friendship Force more visible in your region. Remember, however, the goal of the project should be to expand the Friendship Force in your region—through new members and/or ambassadors and hosts.

3. Club mentoring and leadership development:

a) Sponsoring a new club. A good project for a strong club would be to provide leadership in establishing a new club. This could be in your region or it could be in another country. In either case, you would work closely with FFI in selecting the target community. You would then establish a 2-3 year plan for developing and supporting the new club.

b) Supporting an existing club. Many small clubs need assistance in developing their own growth plans. Your project could be to work with FFI to select a club in your region that needs this kind of support and to develop a 2-3 year plan for growth.

c) Regional plan: Often clubs can become stronger through close cooperation on a regional basis. Consider a multi-club Trailblazer project that increases cooperation to facilitate the growth of all clubs in the region. This can include regional planning as well as regional exchanges. Regional projects would need to have one person designated as the leader of the project.

d) Leadership development: All clubs need strong leaders. A program focusing on leadership development (within one club or several) would make a great Trailblazer project. This could be leadership workshops, along with supporting materials. It could also involve linking the Friendship Force with other, ongoing volunteer leadership training opportunities in your region.

4. Membership. You could develop a membership campaign that targets younger members, such as the “baby boomer” generation. A comprehensive membership campaign may include publicity, connecting with community organizations, expanding exchange options through new exchanges or fuller use of catalog and global exchanges, as well as possible changes in your club activities. All of these elements may be featured in one Trailblazer Project.

5. Share recent successes: If your club has recently completed a new initiative that resulted in significant club growth, you can consider this as a Trailblazer Project. In this case, however, the project would be to create a presentation of your project that can easily be shared with other clubs on the FFI website. This would include what you did, how it led to growth, and the steps that other clubs can follow to achieve the same results. If the project relates to new membership, you should include what you are doing to retain the new members, showing what impact, if any, the new membership has had on your club. Have you made changes in your club activities, for example, to accommodate the interests of younger members? Have you developed new connections within your community?

6. Other. We want clubs to use their imagination. What about a project that is linked to the new social media as the way to maintain connections between hosts and ambassadors? Or club organizational and leadership techniques that make operating a club easier? Unique club activities, including World Friendship Day, could also be the focus of a Trailblazer project. Another idea is for a group of clubs to cooperate on a series of exchanges that are reserved for younger members. By working together, one or more clubs can recruit the younger ambassadors, with another club recruiting younger hosts. Use your imagination and experience, sharing with FFI ideas that you think could lead to growth!

We look forward to hearing from you.

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