

History and Mission

From Michael Palladino, President of Friends of SOTA
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General Information

Friends of SOTA (FoSOTA) is a 10-year-old 501(c)3. The current board members include alumni, parents, a former principal, and a retired discipline chair. The FoSOTA Board meets the first Tuesday of each month in the Teachers' Lounge, and the principal or his representative is always part of the agenda. Everyone is invited to attend; agenda items should be submitted at least five days before the meeting. FoSOTA committee meetings are also open and volunteers are appreciated.

Mission

The simple goal of Friends of SOTA is to raise money, and to make life easier for the current faculty, staff, parents, and students. In order to accomplish this, we work with the principal and departments chairs to identify outreach and fundraising opportunities.

Relationship to Ruth Asawa School of the Arts

A memorandum of understanding between FoSOTA and SOTA delineates roles on both sides. All financial reporting is available for review by any interested party. Grant requests are made by the chairs and approved by the principal before they are submitted to FoSOTA. To date, no request has been denied by FoSOTA.

The total annual cash flow, including Discipline Donations, the Parents' Annual Fund, box office receipts, and grants is under \$1 million. We have board members with extensive experience in nonprofits, accounting, and budget management. Over the past three years, we have relieved the school and the PTSA of significant administrative burdens related to fundraising, budget management, check processing, and the Artists-in-Residence program.

Continuity

FoSOTA is able to provide long-term continuity to the school since it is made up of volunteers who generally are not current parents and who commit to at least a three-year term. This is particularly important in long-term planning, fundraising, and community outreach. This frees current parents to focus on volunteering within each discipline and community building across the school. We have also found that philanthropists are hesitant to donate directly to a public school and are more comfortable dealing with a nonprofit.

Insurance

Friends of SOTA carries insurance appropriate to our activities, and a Parents' Organization would be covered at no additional cost.

Parents' Committee Proposal

The function of the Parents' Committee under FoSOTA would be identical to the core functions of the current PTSA: volunteering. The parents would organize themselves as they best see fit, and could reorganize whenever they wanted.

As we are doing in other areas of the school, we are simply proposing to eliminate redundant efforts and costs and to encourage as much flexibility as possible, to better serve the school and parents.

We are all supportive of the PTA's advocacy work and the advantages it provides to, literally, every other school. However, over the years, we realized that SOTA is in a unique position. Because we have to conduct major fundraising each year to cover the Artists-in-Residence program, and our parents are responsible for producing almost 100 performances a year, adding the PTSA into the mix has been a little confusing and does create redundancies. I was a SOTA PTSA president, as were a couple of other board members, so we know firsthand the challenges of the SOTA environment.

Because parents are so involved with their disciplines, active participation in the PTSA has been very light. Because of the PTSA structure, the group has to have a treasurer and maintain its own set of books, as well as follow other guidelines and restrictions specified by the statewide bylaws. All insurance and financial responsibilities can be folded into Friends of SOTA's existing structure.

The Parents' Annual Fund and Discipline Donations

Fundraising is critical. Because SOTA does not receive additional money from the district for our Artists-in-Residence program, we need to raise approximately \$300,000 a year to keep the program going as well as fund additional academic and program needs. We've found that adding an additional ask for PTSA dues and donations adds confusion to the fundraising message.

Transition

Friends of SOTA started 10 years ago. At the time, Carlos Santana's son Sal was a student. Santana held a concert at the Fillmore each year, and FoSOTA was created to manage the money. FoSOTA did not do any additional program development during this time.

About five years ago, the initial money was spent and the founding board rolled off. At that time, Anne Yanow (former PTSA treasurer and president and now alum parent) became the FoSOTA treasurer, I became president, and she and I worked together to draft a new group to restructure the organization as an active fundraising unit. That group included Bonnie Bearden (former PTSA president), Joe Rosenblatt (former principal during the Font Street era), and Jerry Pannone, now orchestra director emeritus.

I was a SOTA PTSA president for two years, and created and maintained the parent/alum/event/fundraising database and website. On the nonprofit side, I was a member and president of the Business Arts Council (affiliated with the Chamber of Commerce) for six years, and president of the Z Space Studio board for six years (a new play development group and home of the Word for Word performance series, currently working out of Theater Artaud).

Midterm Goals

FoSOTA's midterm goal is to launch an endowment campaign, with a goal to raise \$3 million to \$5 million dollars. We have a chairperson and have developed a strategic plan in support of that. But, a funny thing happened on the way.....

Outreach and Community Fundraising

It became clear from the strategic plan that if we were going to target funding outside the parent community, the school needed to have accurate and transparent financials, and we needed to have a case for support that attracted donors and philanthropists with no prior connection to the school. That pretty much means we need to be competitive with every other nonprofit in the City.

Getting the House in Order

The first step was standardizing financial reporting. Up until three years ago, all discipline contributions and box office receipts were deposited into a district Student Account (managed by the SFUSD), which is primarily intended for small amounts of money related to the prom and other student activity. The Parents' Annual Fund was managed by the PTSA, and the results would vary from year to year depending on the skills and interests of each successive board.

The arts chairs had to manage their own discipline's fundraising, collection, and spending. Financial reporting within each discipline was inconsistent. We literally had no idea at the school level how much money was needed and our level of unmet need each year. Plus, the district bookkeeper finally reached a point where she reported that she felt that the amount of money and spending activity involved (around \$300k a year) was inappropriate for a Student Account.

Memorandum of Understanding

At that point, SOTA and the SFUSD proposed that FoSOTA take over the administration of all of the discipline and box office monies. We created a memorandum of agreement with the school/district and have been managing the funds ever since. In that time, through the huge efforts of Colleen Ivie (current parent), we have worked with the arts chairs to develop budgets, administer the donation process, and have produced accurate and transparent financials. We know down to the penny what every discipline needs, what is raised, and how it is spent.

Parent Volunteer Focus

Concurrently, we worked with the PTSA to relieve them of the responsibility of running a major fundraising campaign each year. The goal is to allow parents to focus on volunteering. The PTSA and faculty are still crucial to getting the word out about the need for the funds, but Friends of SOTA handles the administration, collection, thank you letters and tax acknowledgment letters.

Artists-in-Residence Program

Last year, while working with the principal, we realized there was another opportunity to provide administrative support for the school and create some additional flexibility for the chairs. The 65+ Artists-in-Residence are paid by the school as independent contractors. Having that number of contractors created an onerous bookkeeping task for SOTA staff. Each artist had to be listed individually in the K Resolution that the district approves to spend this type of money. If there was any

change to any artist (which was common), the K Resolution had to be revised and re-approved. In addition, scheduling and paying 65 contractors each month was a significant burden on the school staff.

We signed an agreement with the district the beginning of the last school year making Friends of SOTA the vendor for the Artists-in-Residence. Now the school has much more flexibility around the actual scheduling, payment and oversight of subcontractors. We submit a blanket K Resolution covering the services rendered without having to specify each artist by name. So, the chairs have leeway to move things around as they choose. We also took over the responsibility to make sure every contractor submits to a background check, is fingerprinted, and has a health clearance according to District requirements.

The artists are still selected by the chairs, but the school is relieved of a heavy staff burden.

Current Board Members (2012)

Michael Palladino, President
Colleen Ivie, Vice President
Anne Yanow, Vice President, outreach
Tom Weverka, Secretary
Hilary Mahon, Treasurer
Judy Barkett, member
Abbie Yant, member
Joe Rosenblatt, member
Jerry Pannone, member

Suggestions?

I hope this gives you some context for Friends of SOTA. We are always looking for volunteers who are interested in working with the fundraising and outreach committees, and welcome suggestions from everyone in the SOTA community.