

Gift policy

VT Public Library MONEY minute 6 APRIL 2020



Dear library friend,

Who doesn't need more money for programming or a special project? Gifts and donations can be a valuable part of every Vermont public library's fiscal strategy. As such, I suggest that libraries should have a gift and donation policy that clearly describes the gifting process.

Many good-hearted people often consider that their gifts will be enthusiastically welcomed as additions to the library's book collection or can help in another way – furnishings, equipment, or art work, for instance. But sometimes gifts are not as welcomed as the donor expects. So it's important to explain to potential donors and library patrons that their generosity is welcomed and appreciated *while* being respectful and clear about what gifts would benefit the library most.

Consider these key items when putting together a gift policy:

- Guide potential donors to speak to the library director (or designee) about what types of donations are most helpful to the library. Having this section of the policy in place can make conversations with donors much easier. It allows you to express personal gratitude to the donor while explaining what types of support are most helpful.
- Guide the donor to give an *unrestricted* gift. An unrestricted gift can be used for any purpose. A restricted gift is a gift that is for a specific purpose; for instance, "\$200 for books" is restrictive; "\$200 for library needs" is wonderfully broad. Restricted gifts require *tracking* in accounting.
- Be clear about what is accepted and what is not accepted. Due to space, time, and staffing, your library may decide not to accept donations, or you might limit the types of donations that are accepted.
- Your mission and vision, as found in your strategic plan, should be connected in a meaningful way to

your gifts and donations policy. How do gifts help meet your mission? How *could* gifts meet your library's vision?

- Describe the terms of acceptance, including how the library evaluates the gift for use or disposal.
- Make certain that you state that the donated item becomes the property of the library and its use or disposal will be subject to the library's gift acceptance policy. Some wording on disposal is valuable.

There are a number of gift policy examples on the web. For instance, the following hyperlink brings you to an example policy on donation of *materials* and funds for materials from the [American Library Association](#). It speaks to acceptance procedures, donation of funds for materials, and even has this interesting paragraph on reconsideration of donated materials:

"All public libraries contain materials that some patrons may find objectionable. Libraries may omit from the collection materials that some patrons feel are important. In either case, the library has procedures that patrons may use in requesting the reconsideration of materials."

Well-thought out examples of public library gift policies are found in Vermont. [Middlebury's Ilsley Public Library](#) (PDF) includes a statement of purpose and definitions. The [Milton Public Library](#) (PDF) has a policy that goes into depth on definitions and includes a form for the donor (note that it specifies the gift as *unrestricted*, which will result in a much easier time of managing the gift). Shelburne's Pierson Library has a [gift acceptance policy](#) (PDF) that goes into depth on all manner of possible gifts and has four links at the end of the document for even further reference.

More questions? Desire more guidance? Please contact me using the information below!

Gary

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