How to Fund a Library Building or Renovation

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A library building project needs a complete funding plan. Establish what public funding can cover and identify the remaining need. Then assess the role private donations could play. The library and its fundraising partners need agreement about the project before approaching donors.

Establish What the Library Needs to Accomplish

Describe the services the proposed building or renovation will make possible. Explain the limits of the current space using information from the library's planning process. Connect a physical improvement to how people will use the library.

Confirm the scope and project budget with the appropriate leadership. Include the costs of opening and operating the space, so a successful building campaign also prepares the library for the responsibilities that follow.

Clarify Public Funding and the Remaining Gap

Document which funds are committed and which are still being sought. Public allocations, eligible grants, reserves, and private donations may each have a role. Available sources and approval requirements depend on the library's structure and location.

The American Library Association's fundraising resources address funding beyond the governing authority's allocation. Use relevant local and state sources to confirm which options apply to your project.

State precisely what private gifts would pay for. A donor should be able to understand the relationship between the campaign and the project's other funding. Avoid presenting an application or anticipated allocation as a confirmed commitment.

Agree on Fundraising Responsibilities

Clarify the responsibilities of library leadership and its governing body. Where a foundation or Friends organization participates, agree on who will conduct the campaign and receive the gifts. Confirm who approves the case and who reports progress to donors.

Document the decisions needed before a gift is accepted. These may include recognition arrangements and the handling of restricted gifts. Resolve the responsibilities with the appropriate financial and legal advisers for the organizations involved.

Assess Donor Relationships Before Announcing a Goal

Community enthusiasm is useful information. A campaign also needs evidence about prospective philanthropic commitments. Consider the relationships already established through the library and its partners, including people whose connection extends beyond prior giving.

A feasibility study can test how prospective donors understand the project and what questions affect their willingness to contribute. The findings help the leadership decide whether to proceed with the proposed campaign or revise its scope.

The Campaign Readiness Assessment provides a starting point for an internal discussion. Read the building fundraising guide for the relationship between the project budget and a campaign goal.

Explain the Use of Gifts and Prepare for Stewardship

Make giving opportunities specific enough for donors to assess. If you offer to recognize a donor by placing their name on a space, confirm that the appropriate authority has approved the arrangement before including it in donor materials.

Plan how donors will hear about progress through construction and opening. If the scope or schedule changes, explain the consequences for the use of their gifts.

Plan the Campaign With Experienced Counsel

Empowered Fundraiser Consulting provides campaign counsel for community spaces. A fundraising strategy session can address the decisions involved in your library project.

For the terminology and phases, read what a capital campaign involves.

Questions About Library Capital Campaigns

Can private donations help fund a library building or renovation?

Private gifts may contribute alongside other confirmed funding. Define what those gifts would pay for and assess prospective donor interest before setting the philanthropic campaign goal.

Who should lead a library fundraising campaign and receive the gifts?

Library leadership and its governing body should agree on responsibilities with any participating foundation or Friends organization. The agreement needs to identify who conducts the campaign, receives gifts, approves materials, and reports to donors.

What should library campaign donors know before giving?

Donors should understand how their gifts will be used and any approved recognition arrangements. The campaign should also explain how donors will receive progress reports and information about changes to the project.