

SIX TIPS FOR DONATING BOOKS TO YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

1. Research the collection.

Most public libraries now have Web-based catalogues. So before choosing which books to donate, do some online research to see what kind of books your library already has on social issues, such as homosexuality, same-sex marriage, abortion, stem-cell research, etc. That will help you identify how your library's collection might be better balanced.

Are there books promoting same-sex marriage, but little or no books explaining the need to protect traditional marriage? Are there books by homosexual authors, but little or none by ex-gay authors—individuals who've experienced homosexuality and walked out of it? Knowing this information will not only help you make a better case when donating books—but will also assist you in deciding which books are most needed and which library collection could most use them.

2. Ask about the donation policy.

Before making donations, ask the librarian what the policy is for making donations. You might also be able to find instructions on the library's Web site. This is important because it is more difficult to justify a denial of your donation if you carefully followed the procedure. The librarian may say there is no official policy. If that happens, just make a note that there was no official policy given upon request. But if there are official procedures, get a copy of them in writing and be sure to follow them to the letter.

3. Ask specific questions.

Community libraries may be easier to donate to than school libraries. (See "Advisory on School Libraries" at the end of this tip sheet.) However, be aware that many community libraries reserve the option to resale the books or simply discard them. So you'll want to specifically ask how the book will be used and what it would take to get the book on the shelves.

Note: If the librarian cites difficulties with accepting donated books, ask if you can make a financial donation for the librarian to obtain a particular book for that specific collection. Don't let them put you off by simply offering to temporarily transfer a book from another location—make it clear that you would like for the requested titles to be added to that specific location.

4. Donate books in good condition.

Libraries will not accept books that have missing covers, damaged or mildewed pages, etc. So donate new or barely used books in excellent condition.

5. Ask for equal access.

When donating to either school or community libraries, you can cite the American Library Association's own assertion that it "actively promotes equal access" and its stated commitment to "presenting all points of view on current and historical issues." (See "[In the American Library Association's Own Words](#).") Then give an example of how the book you're donating provides an alternative to viewpoints already included in the collection. For an example of how this might work with books about homosexual issues, please review our sample "[Book Donation Comparison Chart](#)."

6. Take a friend or family member.

When making your donation, it's a good idea for at least two people to go together and present the books, along with a written, dated memo that lists the books being donated and your contact information.

If the library accepts the materials ...

Be sure to follow up and verify they are catalogued in the system and placed on the shelves. Write a thank you note to the librarian.

If the library denies the materials ...

If this happens, don't feel that you have failed—you've still made an important point just by attempting the donation. This not only sheds light on the need for another viewpoint, but also exposes possible bias and hypocrisy on the part of the American Library Association. If you feel that the bias is obvious—and that your books have been denied, while other books meeting the same standards have been included in the collection—you can take your case to the public square. Consider writing letters to the editor or calling local talk shows. (See the [“The Truth About Banned Books Week”](#) for help in expressing your viewpoint.)

Ultimately, it's a family decision whether or not to appeal a denial to the next level, which may involve going to a library board or committee. Also be aware that legal precedent regarding library collections is unclear and still developing, particularly when it comes to school libraries. So there may not be an immediate legal solution. As a result, your best bet upon receiving a denial may be to take your case to the public square through local media or grassroots rallies.

Advisory on School Libraries: Be aware—it might require extra persistence!

As students in Fairfax County, Virginia, [recently discovered](#) school libraries can be the most biased. They may attempt to shut out books by implementing unusually strict standards for acceptance. When donating to public school libraries, therefore, it's especially important to get a copy of the policy in advance and follow it. It's also very important to donate high-quality books that base arguments on good social science data or contain compelling true stories. (See the books listed on the sample [“Book Donation Comparison Chart.”](#))

From an age-appropriate perspective, it's probably best to focus your efforts on high school libraries, especially when donating books on controversial issues that require more maturity to comprehend. But most importantly, be prepared as a family for a battle that requires persistence: And be prepared for the need to appeal the immediate librarian's decision to the next level, usually the principal—or for the need to have a public rally. Watch the Fairfax County students' rally in this [video](#).

At each step along the way, your family can make decisions on how far to take your efforts through prayer and discussion. Thank you for considering this important family project for impacting communities!