

Historic Libraries Forum

Bringing together and supporting historic libraries

Setting up an Adopt-a-Book scheme

Introduction

Historic libraries can benefit from various fundraising and income-generating activities, from donate buttons on websites to library-related merchandise, second-hand book sales, room hire and film location fees, and chargeable in-person and online events.

Fundraising is about raising money and awareness simultaneously. The benefit of an Adopt-a-Book scheme is that, ultimately, it is about relationship. By adopting a book, a supporter participates in the history of a library's collection and becomes part of its story – a story that may stretch back hundreds of years and extend long into the future.

While many historic libraries run Adopt-a-Book schemes, each differs in scope and design according to the library's needs and resources. The following guidance will help you decide whether such a scheme is right for your library. It is worth taking the time to research the sort of scheme that will work best for you and to consider how much money you want to raise and what resources you can put towards running it. Although there is a certain amount of work involved in setting up an Adopt-a-Book scheme, if planned carefully it can be a straightforward and rewarding way to raise money and to gain lifelong supporters and advocates.

What to consider

What's your story?

Fundraising involves asking people to part with their hard-earned money. Donors are more likely to support causes that are close to their hearts so state your case and demonstrate why people should support *you*. Frame your fundraising with your story – Who are you? what is your history? what is your strategic vision? what is unique about you? what do you offer your members or users? and why do you need support?

Fundraising is a great opportunity to remind people what you do and why. For example, if you are raising funds for conservation, you need to explain why conservation is important. It may seem obvious, but you might explain to potential supporters that you cannot embed your learning and engagement programme, exhibitions, and research in deteriorating collections or that, without their financial support, there is a real danger that your collections will not survive to be enjoyed by future generations.

Make your story compelling: 'Years of being pulled on and off shelves, the smoke from coal fires, rooms that were too damp or too dry, and the occasional insect, have all taken their toll'.
(Bromley House Library, Nottingham)

How will you spend the money?

Donors want to make a difference and you can develop trust by telling them how you will spend their money in real terms. Adopt-a-Book schemes typically raise money for conservation. If the money is going into a general conservation fund, give donors an idea what you can purchase with their donations; for example, £20 will fund an unbleached cotton book pillow, £30 will fund 6 reels of unbleached calico conservation tape and £50 or more will fund the purchase of archival storage boxes for artworks and archival card to make 'shoes' for vulnerable books.

If you are raising funds towards the conservation of specific books, you might offer your supporters some idea about what is involved in restoring a book. Repairing a book with minimal interference to the original structure is costly and painstaking work and the conservator must choose materials that preserve the integrity of the book. If people know how much things cost, they can donate accordingly.

Whatever you decide to spend the money on, demonstrate the public benefit of donations, whether it's broadening access to collections through digitisation or preserving them for future generations.

What will your donors receive in return?

You might issue certificates or e-certificates, place personalised bookplates inside adopted books, enter the adopters' names in a special register of donations or make a note of the adopters on your online catalogue records. Consider offering donors the option of receiving your regular newsletters to keep in touch and find out more about what you do. You might publish a list of adopters on your website or include the names of donors in newsletters and annual reports. Note, some donors may wish to remain anonymous.

Consider holding an annual community event for adopters to thank them and to provide an opportunity for them to see their adopted books in situ and to meet other supporters. You might invite your book conservator along to discuss the work they do and the materials they use, or you might invite adopters to share personal stories about their adopted books and why they chose them. An annual event, whatever form it takes, is a great way of demonstrating to donors the positive impact of their donations.

For donors who give a little more, you might offer a memorable experience such as a private tour of the library or a behind-the-scenes tour of the conservation studio.

Some donors will be happy not to receive anything in return but almost all donors will want to feel part of something special. For many, it is enough to know that they are participating in the preservation of your library and that by adopting a book they are becoming part of its history.

How will you promote your scheme?

Once you have established your Adopt-a-Book scheme you will need to promote it on your website, on social media platforms, in blogs, displays, emails, newsletters and annual reports and through your learning and engagement programme. Encourage your staff and volunteers to champion your scheme and spread the word to family and friends. Design an attractive website – it's worth taking some good quality photographs, especially before and after shots of conserved books. You may even want to invest in a glossy printed leaflet although this is not a good idea if you are wanting to include information about specific books that require

conservation as it will require updating regularly. Whatever promotional activities you employ, you will need to consider how you will continue to promote your scheme.

Will you claim Gift Aid?

Gift Aid boosts each donation by 25p for every £1 donated. If you do want to claim Gift Aid your donors will need to:

- Give their consent for you to claim Gift Aid on their donations
- Confirm that they are UK taxpayers
- Confirm that they understand that if they pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax in the current year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all their donations that it is their responsibility to pay any difference.

Note, however, that not all donations raised through Adopt-a-Book schemes may be eligible for Gift Aid:

- If you 'charge' to adopt a book, for example you ask for a 'minimum' donation or a donation 'from' a certain amount, you may not be able to claim Gift Aid. Gift Aid is not applicable to a 'minimum donation' where there is no choice about payment.
- If you offer an adoption gift package in which your donors receive benefits such as a private tour of the library followed by refreshments in your café, you may not be able to claim Gift Aid. You cannot claim Gift Aid on donations where the value of the benefits exceeds certain limits.

A 'suggested donation' can be useful to give donors an idea about what funds you are hoping to raise without being prescriptive – you may receive less, but you may also receive much more than you were expecting!

Disclaimer: The Historic Libraries Forum is not able to offer financial advice about Gift Aid and it is your responsibility to investigate whether you can claim Gift Aid on donations to your Adopt-a-Book scheme. For more information visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/gift-aid-what-donations-charities-and-cascs-can-claim-on#when-you-cannot-claim-gift-aid>

How much will you ask for?

If you decide that you do want to set minimum or exact donations, there are several options. If you want to keep it simple, you might ask for £25 per book, or a 'minimum' of £25 per book. Other libraries offer categories of donations; for example, £25 or more for books dated after 1700, £50 or more for books dated between 1601-1700, and £200 or more for an incunable. You might decide to 'charge' according to type of material: £200 to adopt a medieval manuscript, £100 to adopt an incunable and £50 to adopt a printed book to 1801, and so on.

If your Adopt-a-Book scheme relates directly to the conservation of certain books you may choose to ask for the full cost quoted by your book conservator. This has the benefit of ensuring that you have the full amount to pay for the conservation. If you choose not to ask your donors to cover the full cost of conservation you will need to make sure you can make up any shortfalls from your conservation budget or from other non-restricted funds. Match-funding donations may encourage your supporters to donate more.

Whatever you decide, make it easy for people to donate. An online application form offering online payment may be your simplest option.

How will you protect donors' personal information?

In any fundraising scheme you are likely to handle personal data. Make sure you are compliant with current data protection legislation and include a data protection tick box statement on the adoption application form confirming that the donor gives you permission to hold their information for the purposes of administering your Adopt-a-Book scheme.

What do you hope to achieve through your adoption scheme?

Anything and everything ...

Some libraries offer donors the opportunity to adopt any book (or other object), regardless of its age and condition. This has the benefit of being democratic – it allows everyone to participate, whether they can donate a little or a lot. It encourages lasting relationships between people and books: donors can choose a book that is meaningful to them, or to a friend or family member. It's ideal for those looking to commemorate an important life event, such as a wedding, christening, or the passing of a loved one – an In Memoriam adoption.

Book adoptions also make excellent Christmas and birthday presents. Donors may want help choosing the perfect book so create a suggestions page on your website of a few pre-selected titles for those who don't know where to start.

The money raised in a general adoption scheme can be used for anything from conservation to digitisation but remember to tell your donors what you will spend their money on, so they can see how they have made a difference to your library.

Note, donors will not be pleased to discover later that their adopted book has been disposed of so make sure they can only adopt books in your permanent collection.

A little worse for wear ...

Most Adopt-a-Book schemes are designed to raise money for the conservation of the adopted books. There are various options depending on your time and resources.

Some libraries allow donors to choose books for conservation. While this may seem a good way to involve your supporters in the collections, there are pitfalls to consider:

- What if the books chosen by your donors do not chime with *your* priorities for conservation? Even if donors cover the full cost of conservation, your book conservator may have limited time to commit to conserving your books (especially if they work for other institutions) and you don't want to end up with lots of beautifully conserved books, none of which you are planning to use in your learning and engagement or exhibition programme.
- If donors do not cover the full costs of conservation and you decide to make up the shortfall from other funds you will need to make sure you have the funds to do so. You

may need to limit the number of adoptions in any financial year so that you can plan accordingly and ensure you don't over-spend.

- How will you obtain quotes for the conservation of books chosen at random by donors throughout the year? Will you employ your book conservator to quote every time you receive an adoption request, or will you 'save up' requests so that you only approach your book conservator once or twice a year? Remember, you will need to pay your conservator for their time to provide quotes for conservation work.
- What if your donors change their minds and decide to pay for the conservation of a different book? - you might end up paying for a quote that you don't use. (Don't count on keeping the quote until another donor comes forward to adopt the book at a later date - the costs and accessibility of materials changes and no quote will be ensured for long.)

Many libraries opt instead for creating a shortlist of conservation priorities for donors to choose from – an endangered book list. This is ideal if you have a tight conservation budget or if you have little time to commit to running an Adopt-a-Book scheme. It may take a little time at the beginning of the year to choose and photograph your books and to do research so you can tell potential donors the story of each book, including why it is important and how you plan to use it once it is conserved. You may want to consider displaying your endangered books in the library. However, once you have received quotes for the work and set up your website, all you really need to do is promote your scheme. If you are lucky enough to find donors for each book, check whether your book conservator has time to quote for a second list of books.

Be flexible where you can. If a donor is keen to pay in full for the conservation of a book but isn't interested in the books on your priority list, suggest another book.

Finally

You may decide to run a different sort of adoption scheme altogether – for example, an Adopt-a-Shelf scheme or an Adopt-a-Box scheme (especially useful if you are looking to box vulnerable books rather than conserve them, or you are raising funds to conserve archival materials). In some libraries you can even adopt a chair or a desk. Whatever you decide, these guidelines should help you get started.

Adopt-a-Book schemes

British Library: <https://support.bl.uk/Page/Adopt-a-book>

Bromley House Library, Nottingham: <https://bromleyhouse.org/adopt-a-book/>

Devon and Exeter Institution, Exeter: <https://devonandexeterinstitution.org/support-us/>

Gloucester Cathedral: <https://gloucestercathedral.org.uk/cathedral/heritage/archive-and-library/adopt-a-book>

Lincoln Cathedral: <https://lincolncathedral.com/get-involved/give-to-the-cathedral/adopt-a-book/>

London Library: <https://www.londonlibrary.co.uk/support-us/adopt-a-book>

Portico Library, Manchester: <https://www.theportico.org.uk/adoptabook/>

Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh: <https://library.rcsed.ac.uk/adopt-a-book>

St George's Chapel, Windsor: <https://www.stgeorges-windsor.org/archives/adopt-a-book/>

Worcester Cathedral Library: <https://www.worcestercathedral.co.uk/support-us/adopt-a-book>