



## Donations-in-kind Best Practices Guide

DONORS | *How do I become an informed donor?*

BENEFICIARIES | *How do I become an informed project organizer?*

PLANNING TIPS | *What are some planning tips for common donations-in-kind?*

Your club can participate in a variety of projects that involve donated goods. The tips and best practices below can help beneficiaries communicate their needs, and help donors fill those needs. In addition to reading the sections that apply to you, consider reviewing sections written for your Rotary club partner.

While donated goods are often needed, other forms of assistance can lead to more sustainable service. Donating funds so that beneficiaries can purchase items locally can reduce cost, support the local economy, and avoid language discrepancies in materials like books, instructions, and operating manuals. Also, shipping fees, customs clearance, and other associated costs usually can make international donations of goods less effective.

### Donations-in-kind

#### *A useful donation-in-kind*

A donation-in-kind is a nonmonetary contribution of goods or services.

- Fits the exact needs determined by local beneficiaries or the project coordinator
- Cannot be purchased in the project country
- Is of greater value to the recipient than a financial contribution

Consider donating collected items to a local charity that can make good use of them. Or hold a community yard sale and contribute the proceeds to an international project.

If you have been given an item to donate that is not in good condition, be sure to dispose of it properly. Items such as electronics, machinery, plastics, medicines, and chemicals may be harmful to soil, groundwater, and wildlife if they are discarded carelessly.

#### **Possible donation sources**

- Manufacturers, for excess or discontinued stock
- Publishers and schools, for books in good condition
- Hospitals, medical clinics, and doctors' offices, for functional equipment
- Local, state, and national governments, for surplus equipment, ambulances, and fire engines

#### **General shipping information**

When possible, shipping costs should be paid by the donor. These include the costs of international shipping, customs fees and tariffs, port clearance, warehousing, and local transport to the project site. If a project description does not specify who should pay for the shipment of a needed item, discuss it with the recipient club before you commit to providing the donation. High shipping costs may exceed your club's budget. If so, work with the recipient club or another project partner to share the expense.

Consider partnering or consulting with an organization or Rotarian-sponsored group with experience in transporting goods and services worldwide. Such organizations can offer practical advice on dealing with customs, transportation, and other logistics. In addition to providing assistance with your current project, these organizations may open the door to future partnerships. For example, [Global Hand](#) is a matching service that helps corporate and community groups partner with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to transport goods where they are needed.

Many transportation options are available — international courier, air cargo, maritime shipping, diplomatic pouch, military transport, and even checked luggage; securing a cost-effective one will be one of your biggest challenges.

Some companies offer discounted rates for humanitarian shipments, and businesses with a high volume of international commerce may donate shipping on a space-available basis. When obtaining quotes, note the date, the name of the person you spoke with, and the exact price quoted.

Consider discussing your needs with an international freight forwarder that can handle all aspects of the shipping and documentation. Explore some creative and less-expensive options as well, such as businesses with an export department that might arrange shipping and documentation free or at a reduced cost.

## Collect and sort goods

The type and amount of goods you collect will depend on the availability and size of your storage space, cost of shipping, and feasibility of customs clearance. Once the goods have been gathered, sort them in a way that will be helpful to the recipients.

## Find storage facilities

Ask members in your club if they have access to a storage facility — a garage, school or hospital storage room, or company warehouse. Make sure that the facility has adequate security and that the temperature and humidity are appropriate for safe storage. Also consider the facility's proximity to the collection, sorting, and packing point as well as the shipping point and the shipping destination.

## Pack and inventory items

Your choice of container will depend on the shipping method. A freight forwarder can advise you whether to use heavy-duty boxes, drums, wooden crates, or metal containers. When packing, protect items against water damage, breakage, and theft. Use pallets and shrink-wrapped boxes and waterproof sheeting, if necessary.

When shipping a container to another country, you must provide the recipients a complete list of its contents, so they can apply for duty-free entry. Inventory control also helps you determine how much material each container can hold. Make copies of **each** container's contents for customs declarations, as well as for each contributor's records. [See instructions on inventorying and sample documentation for the United States.](#)

## Assemble documentation

For each shipment, contact the consulate of the recipient country for assistance and information about documentation requirements, as they vary from country to country. Manufacturers, professional appraisers, or NGOs can provide a third-party valuation if one is required. Import tariffs are based on declared value. The freight forwarder will complete a bill of lading or airway bill, export licenses and declarations, and a certificate of origin. If the items have a high value, ask the freight forwarder to help you obtain insurance.

The freight forwarder may refer you to a customs broker in the recipient country if your partner club does not have one. Customs brokers help determine import duties, complete paperwork, and communicate with customs administrators.

## Prepare and ship donations

Label all containers on at least three sides, but never the top. Using dark waterproof ink, write the labels in both English and the language of the recipients' country in legible, bold letters, 5 centimeters (2 inches) high. Place transparent tape or shrink wrap over the label for extra protection.

Labels should use "blind marks" that do not disclose the contents or recipients of the goods. Include the initials of the recipient; the name, address, and contact number of the supplier and distributor; and the full name of the port of entry. Write the supplier's address in smaller letters, so it is not interpreted as a "ship to" address. Number the containers (e.g., 1 of 5) and disclose the country of origin of the goods (e.g., "Made in Canada").

Keep in close contact with the distributor and keep partners fully informed of the shipment's progress. Let your recipient know the number of parcels shipped as well as how the items are packaged and marked, so they can be easily identified at the port of entry.

## Evaluation

After the goods have been received, maintain contact with your project partners and consider working together in the future. Both the donors and the recipients should take time to evaluate the project process; assessing planning, budgeting, and execution, as well as the condition and performance of the items donated.

**Obtain needed goods for your community**

An ideal donation-in-kind project is one that community members can maintain after the Rotary club is no longer involved. After completing a thorough community needs assessment, evaluate your resources, considering such factors as time, volunteers, and availability of goods. If a needed item is not available locally, consider requesting a donation-in-kind. If this is your club's first donation-in-kind effort:

- Be conservative in your estimates.
- Choose a coordinator to monitor progress and serve as the contact person.
- Share your plans with the district governor, who may be able to provide helpful insight and assistance.
- Anticipate how your project will be affected if it does not receive the needed item, and plan accordingly.

**Cultivate in-country partners**

As you begin your project, build good relationships with customs agents and other government officials and obtain any necessary import approvals from them — in writing, if possible. You should also establish contact with agencies that regulate the type of item being donated. For example, if it's medical supplies, consult the health ministry. These contacts can alert your club to changes in import criteria.

**Recruit volunteers**

Volunteers can help you carry out your project more smoothly and efficiently. Community members, Rotaractors, Interactors, and Rotary Community Corps members may be able to assist with storing, organizing, and distributing the goods; making any needed repairs; and translating correspondence.

If you are sending a donated item that requires special knowledge and training to operate, consider hosting an international volunteer with relevant expertise to train local recipients. It's a good way to connect with an international Rotary club, and promote goodwill and understanding.

**Communicate your needs to your partner**

Be specific and selective. Do not hesitate to tactfully explain which kinds of goods are suitable and which are not. Unless you are very clear about your needs, your partner club could end up sending useless items.

**Find storage facilities and domestic transportation**

Choose a storage facility that is convenient to the sorting and distribution point. Make sure it has adequate security and that temperature, humidity, and level of environmental exposure are appropriate for the items. Arrange for domestic transport through an inland/domestic freight forwarder or a transportation company. Low-cost transport options may be available through NGOs, local businesses, or government agencies.

### **Handle customs clearance and import duties**

Obtain information about customs clearance and duty-free entry, and make and confirm the necessary arrangements long before the goods are shipped. Import duties can be steep, and goods will not be released without payment. Hire a customs broker to determine the required documentation and to assist with compliance. A customs broker may also help classify the goods — many items can be classified more than one way — which determines the rate of duty.

Remind your project partner that proper documentation is crucial. Without the right papers, shipments can get held up in customs for weeks, increasing the risk of theft.

### **When the goods arrive**

1. Have a representative of your domestic transport company on hand to expedite customs clearance and guard the donation.
2. Inform your project partner when the shipment has cleared customs.
3. Transport the donation to an intermediate storage area or directly to the recipients.

### **Distribute the items**

Check the condition of donations and inspect them for travel damage. If necessary, make repairs or file insurance claims if the damaged items cannot be used. If any items are not appropriate, try to identify an alternate recipient, or arrange to dispose of them.

### **Ensure that the donation is used effectively**

After the goods have been shipped and received, maintain contact with the recipients. Assist as needed to help them learn to use, maintain, and repair the donated items. Also stay in touch with your project partners, keeping them informed about the project's success and discussing future joint efforts.

### **Assess, celebrate, and share**

Make detailed notes of what you accomplished, what could be improved, and what advice you would share with someone new to donations-in-kind. Forward a copy of these notes to [Rotary Service staff at Rotary International](#). Be sure to thank everyone who assisted; telling volunteers and donors how their contributions have helped recipients.

Publicizing your success helps raise awareness for Rotary and will make others in the community eager to help on a future project. It will help attract donors, volunteers, and possibly new Rotary club members. Spread the word in the local media and industry-specific trade periodicals as well as in club and district newsletters. Contact your district public relations chair for further guidance.

**Academic, scientific, and technical journals**

Journals are an excellent resource for universities, libraries, and medical institutions. To overcome unreliable mail service, provide a subscription of at least three years to a respected journal that the recipient can access online.

**Books, textbooks, and school supplies**

When sending books and textbooks, ensure that they are

- Culturally relevant
- Written in a language understood by the recipients
- Suited to the educational needs (age, audience, technical expertise) of the recipients
- Current: generally less than 10 years old

**Clothing and shoes**

Clothing and shoes are often tied to cultural values, and some styles may not be acceptable. Consider the recipients' climate, culture, religion, and lifestyle before sending these items. If an in-kind donation is preferred by the recipient, be sure to sort and label the items by type, gender of user, and size.

**Computers**

Because computer equipment can quickly become obsolete, this type of donation is best channeled through an organization that has the capacity to refurbish or recycle high-tech equipment. Take into account the devices' usability and lifespan, as computers and computer components pose serious environmental risks if not disposed of properly.

**Food**

Rather than food, consider sending food-production implements or seeds that are appropriate for local growing conditions. If you do send food, be sure it is nonperishable and appropriate to the local religion and culture. Labels and cooking instructions should be in the language of the recipients. Food that needs to be reconstituted should not be sent to a location that has contaminated water sources that could cause serious illness.

**Medical and dental equipment**

Medical and dental equipment donations expand a community's access to needed health services when they are not otherwise available. Donations should be new or like new and repairable. Have an engineer or technical expert examine equipment before it is shipped. Local staff should be sufficiently trained in the use of the equipment, and manuals in the recipients' native language should be made available. The World Health Organization has developed [guidelines for health care equipment donation](#). The Partnership for Quality Medical Donations has also proposed [standards for equipment donation](#). Consult these references before requesting or donating medical devices.

**Medical, dental, and surgical supplies**

When donating supplies such as birthing kits for rural hospitals in developing countries, be sure all instructions are provided in the recipients' native language. Send the requested items in bulk and package them so they remain sterile. When sending dental instruments to several clinics, assemble each clinic's allotment in separate packages. If you have only a small quantity of supplies, consider donating them to a local hospital, clinic, or animal welfare organization instead.

## Medicine, vaccines, and vitamins

Pharmaceuticals, whether prescription or over-the-counter, should not be donated by individuals or community organizations. Accidental mislabeling, expiration, or misuse due to language differences could have fatal results. These items should be sent only by a respected medical organization, to a respected medical organization that can ensure the drugs have an adequate shelf life. The shipment of medicine is also highly regulated, with individual countries placing limitations and rules on imports. The World Health Organization gives essential [guidelines for drug donations](#).

## Vehicles and machinery

Ambulances and construction equipment are popular items for donations-in-kind. For vehicles, remember to determine whether the right- or left-hand drive is appropriate for the region, and ensure that the operating manual is available and translated into the recipients' native language. Make certain that the vehicle takes the appropriate type of fuel, whether diesel or gasoline with optimal octane levels, available in the area. Additionally, the speedometer and other devices should measure in the appropriate units.

For machinery, it is extremely important to determine whether it can be repaired locally — that parts are available and there is the local capacity to fix it. Climate is another key factor: Is it too humid or dusty for certain types of equipment? Large machinery like construction equipment could break down and, in a worst-case scenario, be too big to be towed away. Also, all safety information for particularly complicated or dangerous machinery should be included, in addition to training on how to operate the item.

## Disaster relief and recovery donations

Initial disaster relief involves search and rescue, emergency medical care, and basic necessities like food, water, and shelter. It is important to wait until the recovery process begins to send donations-in-kind, so that unneeded items do not delay or prevent vital supplies from reaching ports and airports in the affected region.

Before planning a donation, find out whether the government is allowing donations-in-kind for the recovery efforts. Often, government and local aid organizations are able to reach those in need without donated goods from other countries.

Consult local and international organizations familiar with the country, as they will be better able to respond to local needs. The websites [InterAction](#) (U.S.-based) and [ReliefWeb](#) (international) list aid organizations working on recovery efforts. Additionally, you may consider supporting projects and organizations that benefit families and long-term housing. The [Center for International Disaster Information](#) offers additional best practices for disaster relief and recovery.