



Vote Smart Fundraising and
Gift Acceptance Policy Manual

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Vote Smart's mission is to provide **free, factual, unbiased** information on candidates and elected officials to **ALL Americans**.

Introduction and Principles

Vote Smart acknowledges the need for transparency and being accountable to donors, board members, government agencies, and current as well as future staff in order to succeed. At Vote Smart, we understand the correlation between the confidence the public deposits in us and their level of support. The *Vote Smart's Fundraising and Gift Acceptance Policy and Manual* aims to gain and maintain a high level of donor trust by establishing guidelines and highlighting ethical conducts when handling donations, gifts and partnerships. At Vote Smart, adhering to ethical fundraising methods and approaches maximizes impact that we can achieve toward our mission.

The intention of this policy is extended, but not limited to, recognizing the importance of Vote Smart's obligations to its members, board members, and staff members and donors. By considering and evaluating many different kinds of donors, Vote Smart will have the resources necessary to realize its mission in a sustainable way over time and to ensure our services are at a level that reflects the needs of all people who use them.

Vote Smart will not accept any support that implies or requires endorsements of political ideas, affiliations and similar. Vote Smart reserves the right to refrain from accepting any cash or real property gift, or pledge of support on non cash gift or services or enter into any partnership with any company or other organization that is contrary to the stated mission of Vote Smart.

Vote Smart will always retain full authority over its factual research and how it is presented across multiple platforms to the public. In no occasion Vote Smart endorses donors or their products, services, events, opinions or related activities.

The funds that Vote Smart accepts will be used for, but not limited to, maintaining its operations, supporting staff compensation, updating technological equipment and

programs, funds for advertisement, support advocacy material, or designated to another area which directly supports the goals of the organization.

Revenue Sources

- Donations (mail, online, in-kind, etc.): Vote Smart is unique because it is a membership based organization. We take pride in knowing that thousands of people are loyal donors and supporters of our mission.
- API services: We offer a subscription service (free to our members), so other organizations and individuals interested in our data can access the vast data collection that Vote Smart staff works so tirelessly in putting above together.
- Grants provided by foundations: At Vote Smart we are committed to improving the work we do, the quality of the research we provide, the several aspects of the workplace, from culture to the operations and equipment, and often we are able to apply for grants that specifically support certain tasks that are vital to the success of the organization
- Corporate Support: At Vote Smart we only accept donations that help us achieve our mission while remaining nonpartisan. Please refer to the Corporate support section for more information.

Donor Privacy Policy

At Vote Smart, the contributions and trust deposited in the organization by the donors are of uttermost importance. Donations and the support received is key to sustaining the mission of the organization. Vote Smart reciprocates the donor commitment to our mission by committing to respecting their privacy. The Donor Privacy Policy is a result of our response to the fidelity and dedication of our donors.

Vote Smart collects the following information that is provided to us online or by mail (and in other offline platforms) such as: name, address, phone numbers, email address, amount of donations, and platform used for donations.

Vote Smart does not share, sell, trade, or transfer donors' personal information, regardless of when they last donated. Credit card numbers are not retained once payment is processed. Vote Smart will only use information internally and only to further its mission. Nevertheless, security measures, while in place for protection, may not prevent all losses, and Vote Smart is not responsible for any damages or liabilities relating to security failures. We use website statistics and metrics to analyze and measure user engagement on our website.

The information Vote Smart retains is used to keep a record of donations, send acknowledgements, mail thank-you letters as year-end tax statements, newsletters mailing, notices, direct mail pieces, and for internal communications and marketing purposes.

If any donor would like to unsubscribe or be removed from our mailing list, please contact membership@votesmart.org or call us at (515) 989-6363.

Donor Transparency

Donor Transparency

At Vote Smart we understand that privacy and transparency are competing priorities and we value them both. We want donors to feel as value their privacy and their data but want the public to understand through our transparent effort that it takes accountability and trust to fulfill our mission. Vote Smart will make public all revenue sources and donors who give \$5,000.00 or more per year. Vote Smart **avoids accepting donations** from corporations and, at discretion, will not accept donations from sources, who, on a decision made by the Executive Committee, pose a conflict of interest, compromising our ability to do our work and exercise our independence in the organization's decision-making processes. Donations that would be identified as posing such a conflict of interest would be returned to the donor.

Gifts of \$5,000.00 or more will be listed in the biannual Impact Report and any Donor Advised Funds will be listed in the biannual Impact Report by the name of the Donor Advised Fund.

In the event of Vote Smart receiving a donation from a corporation that is enrolled in a Gift Matching Program, or a company, corporate, or institution hosts an event in which attendees can choose a non-profit to donate to, regardless of endorsements made by their employer Vote Smart understands that individuals choose freely who they donate to and that donation is reflective of their support and not the corporation's. Vote Smart commits to reaching out to these corporations, institutes, and similar to retain information about the individual donations. If that information proves to be unattainable, Vote Smart will release a disclosure statement in its Impact Report published yearly:

Disclosure Sample (1): Vote Smart has received funding from a Corporate/Institute/etc. during its Gift Matching Event / Conference Event. We understand that this donation comes from individuals who believe in our cause and mission and chose Vote Smart as

a recipient autonomously and are not directly affiliated with their employers political views.

Anonymous Contributions

We strongly encourage contributions in which full transparency is provided, but exceptions will be made to accept anonymous donations that meet the following criteria:

Donations that are made to Vote Smart and are a result of pooled funds from employees at an organization, corporation, institute, or similar organization will be listed as anonymous unless the amount of donation exceeds \$5,000.00. Vote Smart in a transparency effort always reaches out to these donors' facilitators to see about the possibility of thanking individual donors. Due to privacy guidelines in place, similar to ours, sometimes we cannot convey that information. In such an occasion, Vote Smart understands that donations come from individuals under a corporation and not the corporation itself. Vote Smart will decline donations that pose a conflict of interest to its mission and vision goals. Furthermore, anonymous donations will be accepted once all safeguards are put into place and leadership of Vote Smart deems these are sufficient allowing Vote Smart to move forward with the acceptance of such donations.

Gift Acceptance

Cash donations will be received on a rolling basis without extra steps needed to move forward in the receiving, recording, thanksgiving process.

However other types of donations might need to be discussed and approved at discretion of president and Executive Committee:

- Stocks,
- Real estate,
- In-kind services,
- Business interests,

- Personal Property, and
- Cryptocurrency

Other Gifts and Donations

It is worth mentioning that not all donations are cash donations or come directly from the individual donor. Some other forms of donations reach us as stocks and bonds, for example. Stocks and bonds are sold immediately, Vote Smart has followed the best practice of doing this to assure that these are translated to a cash revenue as quickly as possible and match donor's intention for value of donation.

On the occasion Vote Smart receives real estate donations, the President of the organization will decide in conjunction with the Executive Committee what the best course of action is.

Post decision-making and acceptance status of donation reporting requirements will be discussed by the organization and the donor.

Gift Acknowledgements

We want to go above and beyond when it comes to valuing our members and every individual that donates to us. The process of acknowledging gifts also allows us to send a tax receipt to donors interested in using those for tax purposes.

- Recording amount and dates
- Collect donor information, when available
- Update donor info (note date of changes)
- Record gifts according to intention
- Send thank you notes, letters; and
- Send a tax-receipt to donor in a timely manner

In the event of an in-kind donation where the value of the donation is difficult to determine, it will be policy to work with the donor to ensure such a donation is valued by the donor, not Vote Smart. To this end, a statement such as the one below would be included in the acknowledgement:

Your gift in kind may be tax deductible. You have reported its value to us as \$XXXX, and we are deeply grateful for your contribution of goods or services. As the donor, however, it is your responsibility to calculate the value and be prepared to document it for the IRS. Please consult your financial advisor on the rules governing substantiation of gifts in kind.

Endowment Policy

Endowments are an important part of Vote Smart. They are the fruit of the efforts of donors who seek to guarantee the financial future of the organization. We understand their deeper commitment to the mission and we match that commitment by establishing trust and confidence by creating an endowment manual that displays the diligence we aim to achieve and transpire when talking about endowment funds.

Vote Smart has adopted the following policy governing its endowment funds that serves as a guide to support its long-term goals:

I. Definition of endowment as defined by Investopedia:

n. — An endowment is a donation of money or property to a [nonprofit organization](#), which uses the resulting investment income for a specific purpose. An endowment can also refer to the total of a nonprofit institution's investable assets, also known as its "[principal](#)" or "corpus," which is meant to be used for operations or programs that are consistent with the wishes of the donor(s). Most endowments are designed to keep the principal amount intact while using the investment income for charitable efforts.

II. Types of Endowments:

- A. Restricted endowments,
- B. Unrestricted endowments,
- C. Term endowments,
- D. Quasi-endowments.

III. Purpose:

A. Adoption of Policy:

1. This policy is adopted by Vote Smart's Executive Committee. If any modification is required, the Executive Committee shall authorize such changes. If the Executive Committee is unable to provide approval, the President of Vote Smart and one member of the Executive Committee may be authorized to act on behalf of Vote

Smart in establishing endowments in accordance with the guidelines stipulated in this policy.

B. Contingent Use of Endowment Fund:

1. If the fund cannot be used according to the donor's primary intent, Vote Smart reserves the right to repurpose the fund similarly, in conjunction with planning and approval by the Executive Committee. Vote Smart will tentatively use the endowment fund for a similar purpose as originally intended by the donor.

IV. Acceptance and Acknowledgement:

- A. Vote Smart will thank donors promptly, who make outright gifts to the organization, and will recognize them in a meaningful and appropriate way.
- B. The Executive Committee advised by Board Chair and President of Vote Smart has the authority to accept gifts of cash, stocks, bonds, and other securities, including a variety of private and restricted stocks. Vote Smart is available for consultation.
- C. Named funds, whether restricted or unrestricted, must be approved by the organization's Executive Committee.
- D. Other gifts that will be considered on a case-by-case basis: real estate, insurance, and charitable trusts.
- E. The Executive Committee must approve restricted funds, either named or for the general fund.
- F. Personal letters and acknowledgements will be sent to all who donate to an endowment fund, which will acknowledge their gift and their conditions, signed by the President and one member of the Executive Committee.

V. Acceptance and Denial of a Gift:

- A. Vote Smart can, at discretion, deny a gift that poses an obligation to continuing a program that will become a burden or is inconsistent with its mission at the time of the gift proposal.

- B. Any gifts that involve a tax implication will be considered at the discretion of the President before being presented to the Executive Committee, as they might require further financial and estate planning.
- C. Any assets received above a certain amount 100,000 will be added to an unrestricted endowment unless otherwise noted and designated.

VI. Confidentiality:

- A. Vote Smart will always consider the confidentiality of its donors as the first priority in the gift process.
- B. Vote Smart will hold in confidence any information learned about donors and their assets, as well as their philanthropic planning. Donors are encouraged to inform Vote Smart about their endowment gifts but can be assured that their information will be kept confidential unless permission to release it is provided by the donor or the donor's counsel. The exception to this would be a fund named after an individual in which Vote Smart would honor the intent of the donor whose fund is named after.
- C. Name of donors will only be used for marketing purposes if a media release and consent is signed by donor or representative counsel.
- D. Vote Smart increasingly works towards a transparent operation. In support of this effort, Vote Smart may announce endowment funds in the annual Impact Report, other internal and external reports including amounts contributed and pertinent details.

VII. A fund will only be named if:

- A. It is endowed/restricted, and
- B. Meets a minimum of \$50,000.

VIII. This policy will periodically be reviewed by the appropriate committee and may be amended at discretion according to a board resolution process.

- A. Any endowment gift made prior to August of 2022 will be grandfathered according to the original endowment agreements between the donor and Vote Smart at the time of the gift acceptance.

Corporate Support

In order to expand the sources of support, Vote Smart's Development Department, staff leadership, and the President are willing to consider various approaches to negotiating partnerships as well as accept support from the corporate sector that respects our mission. The Executive Committee of the board will regularly review corporate opportunities, in consultation with relevant professionals and staff members, and consider any actions needed.

All corporate donations will be tasked to the President of Vote Smart and treated as a major gift. If the President of Vote Smart identifies a potential conflict it can seek board advice and pursue further discussion with the Executive Committee for approval of donation acceptance.

Corporate Donation Acknowledgement

Corporate acknowledgement will be tasked to the President of Vote Smart in collaboration with the National Director. In order to avoid requests for endorsements and to comply with our external and internal transparency policy all corporate donations acknowledgements will be made and limited to the company's name (or the company's trade name) and the amount of donation will be disclosed if greater than \$10,000.00 and will then be published in our Bi-annual Impact Report.

Anonymous Corporate Donations:

See [Anonymous Contributions](#).

Any donation greater than \$10,000.00 will be considered a major gift from a corporation. Furthermore, major gifts acknowledgement will be developed in a collaborative approach with the corporate donors. It should be consistent with the level of support and the purpose and mission driving Vote Smart.

Process for Policy Updates

This policy has been written addressing circumstances of its time. As fundraising changes and adheres to different trends it is important that the development of giving, annual fundraising, campaigns, donor relationship building and the commitment we have to our donors remain strong and relevant. Vote Smart aims to plan intentionally by improving its fundraising policy in a way that makes sense for the organization in its pursuit of mission achievement. If needed this policy might be amended according to needs as the organization leadership and board see fit, upon and with approval from the Executive Committee. We, at Vote Smart, are aware of the need to amend possible clauses of this policy from time to time and review this policy with approval from the board so it stays relevant through times and social, cultural and economic circumstances.

We are always looking to do things better and more efficiently, and welcome constructive feedback that helps us tailor our policy in a way that aligns with our mission goals. Feedback and suggestions can be sent to: communications@votesmart.org

Drafting Notes: This policy has been drafted by Aline Alves da Costa and Vote Smart staff. This policy was then reviewed by an external fundraising consultant and by the President. It was originally presented, in draft, to the Executive Committee at the September 2022 quarterly meeting. Feedback was recorded and one member of the Executive Committee volunteered to assist in limited edits. It is presented to the Executive Committee on 12/5/2022. If approved, this policy would go into effect on: 02/01/2023.

Policy for Fundraising - Vote Smart (Ed. 2022)