

CLASSIC PIANOS

A Guide to Evaluating Donated Pianos

A practical guide for reviewing a proposed piano donation

When someone offers your school or institution a piano, it's often a generous gesture with a personal story behind it. We created this guide to help you carefully evaluate the proposed donation, understand what it may need, and decide whether it's a good fit for your program.

We recommend looking at the full picture: how the piano would be used, its condition and service needs, the donor relationship, available space, moving costs, and the care it will require over time.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The review happens in two stages. Start with the Initial Piano Review, which your school or institution can complete without a technician. If the piano appears to meet a need, the next step is an in-person Professional Piano Evaluation by a qualified piano technician.

Use the steps below to guide the process from the initial offer through your final decision:

- ☐ **Acknowledge the offer:** Thank the donor and let them know that your organization reviews proposed piano gifts before accepting them. This gives you time to learn more about the instrument, how it might be used, and what care it may require.
- ☐ **Involve the right people:** If the donor has an important connection to your school or institution, it may be appropriate to involve advancement, development, foundation, or administrative staff before making a decision.
- ☐ **Gather information about the piano:** Complete the *Initial Piano Review* form to document the piano's identity, history, service records, current location, photographs, and any known issues. You don't need a technician at this stage.
- ☐ **Decide whether to move forward:** Consider whether the piano could meet an identified need in your program. If it still appears to be a good fit, arrange an in-person evaluation. Your school or institution should select or approve the technician so the evaluation reflects your needs.

- ☐ **Have the piano professionally evaluated:** Ask a qualified piano technician to complete the *Professional Piano Evaluation* form, including the piano's structure, action, tuning stability, tone, repair needs, expected serviceability, and suitability for its intended use.
- ☐ **Look at the full picture:** Consider the technician's findings along with the donor relationship, the piano's history or significance, moving and repair costs, available space, intended use, and future maintenance needs.
- ☐ **Make the decision:** Once you have the full picture, your school or institution can decide whether to accept the piano and respond to the donor with clarity and appreciation. Don't arrange moving or formally accept the piano until the review is complete and the appropriate approval has been given in writing.

IF THE PIANO ISN'T THE RIGHT FIT

If you decide not to accept the piano, begin by thanking the donor for the offer. When appropriate, explain that the decision reflects your school or institution's current needs, available space, or ability to care for the instrument rather than a lack of appreciation for the gift.

In some cases, another placement for the piano or another way of recognizing the donor may be worth considering.

BEFORE YOU FORMALLY ACCEPT THE PIANO

Once you've reviewed the available information and, when appropriate, the technician's findings, make sure the practical details are in place before making a final commitment.

- ☐ Moving access and cost have been confirmed
- ☐ Gift and ownership paperwork has been approved
- ☐ Funding has been identified for immediate work and ongoing maintenance
- ☐ The appropriate institutional approval has been received

A FINAL NOTE

This guide is intended to help your school or institution make an informed decision about a proposed piano donation. It is not an appraisal, a guarantee of condition or value, or a substitute for an independent professional evaluation.

If a donor plans to claim a charitable deduction, they should consult their tax adviser and obtain any appraisal required for tax purposes.

Initial Piano Review

FORM TO BE COMPLETED BY SCHOOL OR INSTITUTIONAL STAFF

Use this form to gather the information you need before deciding whether to arrange a professional evaluation. Start with what you can verify about the piano’s identity, history, service, current condition, and location.

A recent tuning, attractive cabinet, familiar brand name, or positive description from the donor can all be useful information, but they don’t tell you the piano’s overall condition.

Institution name:	
Reviewer name:	
Date:	
Donor name and contact:	
Current piano location:	

Piano identity and documented history

Record the piano’s manufacturer, model, serial number, piano type, and dimensions below:

Manufacturer:

Model:

Serial number:

Piano type:

Dimensions:

Use the serial number to help verify the piano’s age.

Ownership history:

☐ Documented ☐ Partially known ☐ Unknown

When possible, note what is supported by records and what is based on the donor's recollection.

Authority to donate the piano:

☐ Confirmed ☐ Not confirmed

Confirm ownership and authority before arranging an inspection or move.

Records of rebuilding, restoration, or major repair:

☐ Available ☐ Not available ☐ No work reported

If work is reported, note what was done, when, and by whom:

Service and environmental history

Last tuning and servicing technician:

☐ Documented ☐ Partially known ☐ Unknown

Record the date and technician if known. A recent tuning does not establish overall condition:

Tuning and maintenance history:

☐ Documented ☐ Partially known ☐ Unknown

Request available service records and note any gaps in the history:

Previous locations and storage conditions:

☐ Documented ☐ Partially known ☐ Unknown

Note time spent in garages, basements, storage facilities, schools, churches, or other environments:

Known water, moisture, smoke, mold, pest, heat, or moving damage:

☐ None reported ☐ Reported ☐ Unknown

If reported, describe the type and extent of the damage:

Prolonged nonuse or lack of climate control:

☐ None reported ☐ Reported ☐ Unknown

If reported, note the timing, duration, and conditions:

Photographs and preliminary demonstration

☐ Current photographs show the cabinet, keyboard, pedals, interior, plate, strings, hammers, and soundboard. *For an upright, include the back of the piano. For a grand, include the underside:*

☐ Every key and pedal has been demonstrated in person or in an unedited recording. *Note silent notes, sticking keys, unusual noises, or pedal problems:*

Initial review outcome:

☐ Proceed to professional evaluation

☐ More information needed

☐ Do not proceed at this time

If proceeding, arrange an in-person evaluation by a qualified piano technician.

Professional Piano Evaluation

FORM TO BE COMPLETED BY A QUALIFIED PIANO TECHNICIAN

Please complete this form after an in-person examination of the piano. The evaluation should address the condition of this specific instrument, the work it needs, its expected serviceability, and the institutional uses for which it is reasonably suited.

Technician name:	
Credentials or company:	
Inspection date:	

Structure and stability

Plate and primary case structure:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note cracks, distortion, instability, or prior repair:

Pinblock condition and tuning-pin torque:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note whether the piano can hold a stable tuning:

Soundboard, ribs, bridges, and bridge pins:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Identify loose ribs, separated bridges, cracks, or buzzes:

Strings, tuning pins, pressure bar or agraffes, and bearing areas:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note corrosion, breakage risk, or instability:

Evidence of water, mold, pest, smoke, heat, or severe humidity exposure:

☐ No evidence observed ☐ Evidence observed

If evidence is observed, describe the type, extent, and likely consequences:

Keyboard and action

Keys, keyframe, bushings, and key surfaces:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note looseness, sticking, unevenness, or damage:

Action parts:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Identify brittle, obsolete, broken, or worn parts:

Regulation and repetition:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note lost motion, uneven touch, blocking, or checking:

Hammers:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note grooves, filing, hardening, or replacement needs:

Dampers:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note leaking dampers or unwanted ringing:

Pedals and related mechanisms:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

List any adjustment or repair needs:

Pitch, tuning, and musical performance

Present pitch level:

Record measured pitch level:

Pitch correction required:

☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, note the scope of correction needed:

Tuning stability:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Identify loose pins, unstable strings, or other tuning-stability concerns:

Tone from bass through treble:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note weak areas, false beats, dead strings, or limited sustain:

Dynamic range and response:

☐ Satisfactory ☐ Needs attention ☐ Not serviceable

Note concerns with soft control, power, or clarity:

Buzzes, rattles, mechanical noise, or other unwanted sounds:

☐ None observed ☐ Observed

If observed, describe and distinguish minor issues from structural concerns:

Evaluation Summary and Suitability for Institutional Use

REQUIRED WORK AND EXPECTED SERVICEABILITY

Immediate work required before institutional use:

☐ None anticipated ☐ Work required

If work is required, describe tuning, repairs, regulation, voicing, climate-control needs, or other work:

Desirable improvements beyond essential repairs:

☐ None identified ☐ Improvements recommended

Describe any recommended improvements:

Likely work during the next 3–5 years:

☐ None currently anticipated ☐ Work anticipated

Describe foreseeable component replacement or other needs:

Parts and qualified service availability:

☐ Readily available ☐ Limited availability ☐ Significant concern

Note obsolete systems, difficult-to-source parts, or service limitations:

Estimated work

Provide estimated initial and near-term service costs below. Keep moving costs separate.

Immediate essential work:	\$
Desirable improvements:	\$
Next 3–5 years:	\$

Suitable institutional use

Performance, recital, or advanced teaching:

☐ Suitable ☐ Conditional ☐ Not suitable

Teaching studio or rehearsal:

☐ Suitable ☐ Conditional ☐ Not suitable

Practice room or classroom:

☐ Suitable ☐ Conditional ☐ Not suitable

General or occasional use:

☐ Suitable ☐ Conditional ☐ Not suitable

Overall technician assessment

- ☐ Suitable for the proposed use
- ☐ Potentially suitable with the work noted above
- ☐ Not suitable for the proposed use

Reason, conditions, and recommended use:

Technician signature:	
Date:	
Report attached:	☐ Yes ☐ No