



Many Institutions Rethinking Gifts From Sackler Family

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The [New York Academy of Sciences](#), [Columbia University](#), and several other prominent universities, museums, and nonprofits are reviewing their philanthropic relationship with the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin, an opioid-based pain medication, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reports.

In the wake of recent [court disclosures](#), activists have been putting pressure on institutions to stop accepting philanthropic gifts from the Sackler family. Earlier this month, the [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum](#) in New York — home to the [Sackler Center for Arts Education](#), which was funded by a gift from the Mortimer D. Sackler family — was the location of a surprise protest by Prescription Addiction Intervention Now, or P.A.I.N., an anti-opioid organization. Similar protests have been staged at Harvard, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

Members of the Sackler family have argued that their gifts have not been funded by the sale or distribution of OxyContin, which remains Purdue Pharma's most successful product and biggest seller. In a statement, the company notes that "[m]any leading medical, scientific, cultural, and educational institutions throughout the world have been beneficiaries of Sackler family philanthropy for nearly seven decades, including long before OxyContin was approved by the FDA in December 1995. Since that approval, OxyContin has been and continues to be appropriately prescribed by doctors to bring needed relief to thousands suffering from severe pain, including those with cancer and terminal illnesses."

While a thorough accounting of the family's philanthropy has not been made public, estimates put the total in the tens of millions. According to the *Journal's* reporting, the [Mortimer D. Sackler Foundation](#) gave more than \$2.7 million from 2015 to 2017, while the London-based [Sackler Trust](#) awarded £8.4 million (\$11 million) in 2017. The Sackler name also is attached to professorships, awards, museum galleries, and buildings at institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Louvre in Paris, and Yale University.

Returning donated funds or removing the Sackler name from buildings, galleries, and professorships may be difficult, philanthropy and nonprofit experts say. Any such changes would depend on the contracts that usually accompany large gifts resulting in naming rights, as well as the willingness of the parties to negotiate a resolution, said Marcus Owens, a partner at law firm Loeb & Loeb LLP and former director of the Internal Revenue Service's exempt-organizations division. "For the institutions," said Owens, "it's a real balancing act where there hasn't been an actual conviction of a crime, and it's more that the donors have done something that is optically troubling to the recipient."

"For more than half a century, several generations of Sacklers have supported respected institutions that play crucial roles in health, research, education, the arts, and the humanities," a family spokesperson told the *Journal*. "It has been a privilege to support the vital work of these organizations, and we remain dedicated to doing so. While plaintiffs' court filings have created an erroneous picture and resulted in unwarranted criticism, we remain committed to playing a substantive role in addressing this complex public health crisis. Our hearts go out to those affected by drug abuse or addiction."

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