

5 tips on how to pick a CHARITY



Not many of us have piles of money lying around just waiting for the next good cause. And our time is as valuable as our money – if not more so. So, when we give, we want to know we’re making a difference. We want to know we’re making the world – or at least our corner of it – a better place. But how do we decide where to volunteer or donate? There are literally hundreds of great causes – clean water, domestic violence shelters, homes for teen moms, tragedy relief efforts, cancer research, mentors for fatherless children, disabled veterans, refugees, Bible translation...The list is endless.

the good news & **the bad news**

You’re interested in giving! That’s great news. It says a lot about you. You’re thinking beyond yourself and your immediate concerns.

Not everyone who asks you for money is noble. You need to do your research.

A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED.

1. Find a cause that aligns with your values.

That might seem like a no-brainer, but with so many good causes to choose from, how do you determine which one to make your own? Do you just give small amounts to a whole bunch of places? Maybe, but where do you stop? Here are a few questions to ask yourself before you give:

- What issues do you feel passionate about? Is there an injustice that makes your blood boil? Have you or someone you know been significantly helped by an organization? Or have you watched someone suffer who could have been helped? Is there a worthwhile charity doing that kind of work? If you’re a Christian, you might ask yourself, where do I see God at work in the world?

Frederick Buechner said this about vocation, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” You could apply the same idea to charitable giving or volunteer work.

- Is it important to you that the charity be faith-based? If so, you might want to look into whether or not the organization accepts government funding; government dollars come with government strings.
- In addition to asking yourself what you want to give to, you need to consider what you don’t want to give to. For example, the success of the “ice bucket challenge” raised a dilemma for people with opposition to embryonic stem-cell research. They wanted to give to find a cure for ALS (Lou Gehrig’s Disease), but they didn’t want to finance research that conflicted with their pro-life beliefs.

2. Examine the numbers.

When you’ve found an organization that aligns with your values, consider its financial stewardship. What percentage of its revenue goes toward actual programming expenses and what percentage goes toward fundraising and administration? Every fundraiser (even a telephone solicitor) should be able to give you that information. If they can’t, you might not want to donate until you can find out.

Charity Navigator, an online resource for donors looking to research before they give, reported that 7 out of 10 charities they evaluated spent at least 75% of their budget on programs and services while

9 out of 10 spent at least 65%. These ratios provide a helpful point of comparison.

If you want to do a little more investigating, you can ask for the organization’s IRS Form 990, public information which will show how funds were spent. Not all non-profits are required to file a 990, but many do anyway for grant applications and other purposes. Audited financial statements will also provide valuable information about stewardship.

3. Open books are good.

While you’re looking for financial data and statistics, ask yourself, “How easy is it to find this information?” Is the charity willing, eager even, to share how it’s stewarding the funds entrusted to it or does it seem to be reluctant to reveal specifics? Transparency is important. You want to give to a non-profit with nothing to hide.

4. Look for indicators of effectiveness – not just outputs but outcomes.

An “output” is a fairly straightforward measurement of the activities and services provided by an organization, e.g., meals served, patient visits or nights lodging. “Outcomes” have more to do with the results of those services – people employed, families reunited or drop-out numbers reduced. An organization’s website or annual report should provide evidence both of the work it is doing and the difference that work is making.

5. Put out some feelers.

Ask around. To whom are your friends giving? Is your church aligned with any specific non-profits? Look at ratings on reputable websites like Charity Navigator or the Better Business Bureau. Post a request for recommendations on social media and follow up with a little research of your own.

Finally, trust your gut. The conviction that motivated you to give in the first place will more than likely spur you on toward a place where your gift of time, money or gift-in-kind resources will make a significant impact.

Interested in doing some research on UGM?

- > [Learn about the cause behind the Mission.](#)
- > [See the impact on guests.](#)
- > Request a copy of our most recent 990. Call Wil at 509.532.3810.