



INDEPENDENT SECTOR
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Holiday Tips for Giving and Volunteering

As the holidays approach, you may be looking to make donations to charitable organizations. The following tips will help you spend your money well. In addition to financial contributions, consider giving your time and skills. Not only will you help the organization, but you will make contacts, gain experience, and learn more about issues that interest you.

Giving

1. **Be an informed donor.** Whether you receive a mail, telephone, or email solicitation, learn about the organization and its operations, governance, and finances before giving. Visit its website or call to request information. GuideStar (www.guidestar.org), BBB Wise Giving Alliance (www.give.org), and American Institute of Philanthropy (www.charitywatch.org) can also help by providing information on charitable organizations' finances and priorities.
2. **Focus on results, not on ratios.** There is no ideal fundraising percentage nor standard administrative cost that applies to all charities. The way a charity raises money and carries out its programs depends on many factors, including the type of cause, the region it operates in, and the "popularity" of the cause. In addition, accounting rules allow several methods of calculating fundraising percentages, which complicates comparisons. What's more important than simple numbers is the organization's track record in making a difference in people's lives. Look at its website to learn about its programs, and if the organization is local, talk to people in your community about its work.
3. **Don't give your credit card number over the phone if you don't know the solicitor.** If you are not familiar with the person or the organization requesting the gift, ask for the following in writing: the organization's contact information; the caller's name (and company if he or she is a paid fundraiser); and information on the operations, finances, and outcomes of the charity's programs. No reputable group will pressure you to give immediately.
4. **Be aware of new giving opportunities.** Recent changes to the tax laws make it possible, for example, for individuals age 70½ and above to make donations directly from their Individual Retirement Accounts. Learn more about these types of opportunities from the Independent Sector website (www.independentsector.org) or by talking to a financial advisor or staff at a charitable organization.

Volunteering

1. **Decide which issues are important to you.** Look for a group that deals with issues about which you feel strongly. An organization that you already support financially may be a good place to volunteer. Consider what you have to offer, since many positions familiarity with certain equipment, such as computers, or certain skills, such as ability in athletics or communications.
2. **Consider volunteering as a family.** When a family volunteers together, the experience can bring them closer together, teach young children the value of giving time and effort, introduce everyone to new skills and experiences, and create a shared holiday memory.
3. **Be a year-round volunteer.** We tend to think of those in need during the holidays, but volunteering is valuable all year. Check with Idealist (www.idealists.org), Points of Light Foundation (www.pointsoflight.org), VolunteerMatch (www.volunteermatch.org), and Youth Service America (www.servenet.org) for year-round volunteer opportunities.