

SIX QUESTIONS TO ASK CHARITIES BEFORE DONATING:

1. Can your charity clearly communicate who they are and what they do?

If a charity struggles in articulating its mission and its programs, it will probably struggle in delivering those programs. Organizations that can explain who they are and what they're trying to accomplish have a singularity of purpose and a commitment to focused institutional change. The dot.com boom and bust showed that for-profit companies that couldn't articulate exactly what purpose they served and what product they delivered couldn't compete with bricks and mortar businesses with clear visions of who they were, and what they did. Charities are no different. If a charity can't explain who it is and what it does, and why it is needed, find one that can. The stakes are too high and too many good organizations exist who know exactly who they are, what they do, and why they are needed.

2. Can your charity define their short-term and long-term goals?

Organizations without quantifiable goals have no way to measure success. If they have no way to know if they are successful, how can you be sure they are working toward something? Demand that your charity tell you what it is trying to do. Good organizations relish this opportunity. They know what they are working toward today and tomorrow.

3. Can your charity tell you the progress it has made (or is making) toward its goal?

Once again, it's not enough to merely be concerned with a problem. Good intentions are no longer sufficient to warrant your charitable support. The marketplace is too crowded. Ask your organization what it has done to make the issue it confronts better. What are its results? You wouldn't buy a brand of toothpaste if the manufacturer couldn't prove to you that it fought cavities successfully. Why should you support an environmental clean-up organization if it can't show you that it is cleaning up the environment?

4. Do your charity's programs make sense to you?

If you support the mission of an organization, ask yourself if its programs also make sense. You believe in the cause, and you hope for the end result, but is the organization working toward that result in a way that seems rational and productive to you? If an organization's goal is to promote kindness toward animals, does it pursue its goal in a way that makes sense to you, or does it merely inflame the issue? Do you want your research organizations doing advocacy? Do you want your outreach organizations making policy, or your policy organizations doing outreach? Maybe you do, maybe you don't. This doesn't mean that every organization should be singular in focus. It also doesn't mean, however, that you have to support every organization that has the same belief system as you. Just because you support the ends, you may not support the means. If you know you want to support the outcome the charity aims to deliver, ask yourself if its method of arriving at that outcome makes sense to you.

5. **Can you trust your charity?**

Our research has shown that the overwhelming majority of charities in this country are not only responsible and honest, but well-managed. So we give with confidence. You should feel the same way before you give. Don't support a charity until you feel comfortable with it. A guilty and distrustful giver is a one-time giver. To gain this trust, use Charity Navigator, or another unbiased source. If you have time, check with the IRS or your state attorney general's office. Call the President of the organization, and ask the questions you need answered before you can be assured this is a good use of your money. Ask for an annual report. Do whatever it takes to put your mind at ease. Use your rights to gather data so that you will be comfortable. Good charities will encourage this. A happy and trusting donor is a willing and supportive donor.

6. **Are you willing to make a long-term commitment to your organization?**

We like to think of giving to charity as a long-term commitment, more akin to marriage than dating. Intelligent giving is motivated by altruism, knowledge, and perspective, not a knee-jerk reaction to a television commercial. You are an adult. You have a budget. You have the means to help others. You want to help. Ask yourself if your charity is the type of organization to which you're willing to make a long-term commitment. When you do this, you agree to support them through good times and bad, and provide the funding it needs to weather economic downturns. In return, it promises to continue working toward addressing the issue you both think is so vital. Look hard and find an organization you can support for many years to come. When you find that charity, give it your dollars, tell it you'll be there through thick and thin, and then continue to support it. Only then will long-term sustainable change take place.

Source: <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=28>