

# Season's Warnings: Some Non-Profits Are Not So Charitable

(NAPSA)—More than one half of all charitable donations are made during the holiday season, but even the most generous among us would benefit from learning more about our charities' business. Do you know that some of America's best-known charities spend less than 50 percent of donations on their stated causes? And, that some non-profits spend almost as much on fund raising as they do on actual programs?


Charitable organizations are required to file financial information with the Internal Revenue Service, which is then public record. You can review free evaluations of more than 1,700 charities at Charity Navigator ([www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)), an independent site with information solely based on charities' IRS filings.

Charity Navigator recommends you ask these questions before donating money this holiday season:

## **Can you clearly identify your charity's mission?**

If a charity struggles in articulating its mission and its programs, it will probably struggle in delivering those programs. The most efficient organizations can explain what they're trying to accomplish, and usually have a singularity of purpose and a commitment to focused institutional change.

### **TIPS FOR GIVING:**

- Look for charities with clearly defined missions and goals.
- Be sure the organization is trustworthy.
- Check the group's rating on [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org)
- Make a long-term commitment. 

## **Can your charity define its short-term and long-term goals?**

Good organizations relish telling you what they are working toward today and tomorrow. Organizations without quantifiable goals have no way to measure success or the efficacy of their work.

## **How is your charity progressing toward its stated goals?**

In a crowded marketplace, good intentions alone are not sufficient to warrant your charitable support. What are the charity's results? It's not enough to merely be concerned with a problem. An organization should have a results-oriented bottom line.

## **Can you trust your charity?**

The overwhelming majority of U.S. charities are well managed, as well as responsible and honest. Don't support a charity until you feel comfortable with it. Industry watchdogs, including Charity Navigator, recommend that an organization spend at least 75 percent of

raised funds on intended programs, and some actually spend a much higher percentage. If you feel uncomfortable with anything you learn during your research, contact the organization's president and ask the questions you need answered.

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

Intelligent giving is not influenced by a 30-second commercial. Instead, it should be motivated by altruism, knowledge, and trust. Look hard and find an organization to which you're willing to make a long-term commitment. 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.

Giving to charity is an important part of how Americans celebrate the holidays. Our generosity during this special season helps feed the hungry, shelter the homeless and clothe the poor throughout the year. And giving feels good, knowing that our money will help others in need. If you want your good deed to make the most difference, it's worth spending a few minutes to ensure that your chosen organization is making good on its promises.