



Charitable Giving: Investigate Before You Donate

In Illinois, more than 25,000 charitable organizations are working to help others in unique ways. Under state law, these charitable organizations, along with professional fundraisers, are required to register and file annual financial reports with the Attorney General's office. Potential donors may then access this information, including income, expenditures, program details and administration costs, before giving to a charity.

It's important to consider how a charity spends its funds before making a donation. To make sure your money is used in ways you consider appropriate, follow these important tips:

- ✓ **Ask how much of your donation will go to the charity** and other detailed questions, including whether the organization is registered and how much of your donation will be used to pay fundraising costs. Solicitors must give you this information if you ask.
- ✓ **Pay close attention to the name of the charity.** Some fraudulent charities use names that sound or look like those of legitimate organizations to mislead you.
- ✓ **Do not pay in cash.** For security and tax record purposes, pay by check, credit card or a format of payment in which you have a record. Be sure to write the full official name of the charity on your check – do not abbreviate.
- ✓ **Request written information.** A legitimate charity will provide you with information outlining its mission, how your donation will be distributed and proof that your contribution is tax deductible.
- ✓ **Do not donate if the solicitor uses high-pressure tactics, asks for payment in cash or insists on sending someone to pick up your monetary/financial contribution.** These are all hallmarks of a scam.
- ✓ **If you receive an email or text message asking for a donation, confirm that the request is from the charity,** and not an imposter, by contacting the charity or visiting its website.
- ✓ **Be cautious of “look-alike” websites.** These fraudulent websites will often ask for personal financial information and may download harmful malware onto your computer.
- ✓ **Don't assume that charity recommendations on Facebook or social media are legitimate and have already been scrutinized.** Research the charity yourself.

To obtain financial information, learn more about an organization or find out if a charity that has solicited you for a donation is registered, visit Attorney General Lisa Madigan's website, www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov, or contact her Charitable Trust Bureau at 312-814-2595 (TTY: 1-800-964-3013).

How To Report Charity Fraud

You can help combat charity fraud in Illinois by reporting suspicious solicitations. Whenever possible, keep notes detailing the date and time of the call as well as any printed materials you receive, the organization's name and the name of the solicitor. Try to remember their "pitch" as well as any other useful information.

To report possible charity fraud, call 312-814-2595 (TTY: 1-800-964-3013) or submit a complaint via Madigan's website: www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov. You also can contact any of the Attorney General's offices around the state.

Charitable Trust Bureau Office of the Attorney General

100 W. Randolph St.
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 814-2595
TTY: 1-800-964-3013

Other Resources:

GuideStar National Database of U.S. Charities

GuideStar provides detailed profiles of more than 640,000 nonprofit organizations nationwide. Its searchable database is sponsored by the nonprofit Philanthropic Research Inc. For more information, visit www.guidestar.org.

Top-Rated Charities

The American Institutes of Philanthropy (AIP) rates more than 400 charitable organizations using a variety of criteria, including percentage of revenue spent on administrative costs. The AIP website lists those charities which have received their highest rating, grouped by topic. For more information, visit www.charitywatch.org/toprated.html.

Philanthropic Advisory Service Reports

Sponsored by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, this site provides evaluations and profiles of charities that solicit nationally or have national or international program services and includes descriptions of programs, fundraising methods and finances. For more information, visit www.give.org.

To learn more about a charity or fundraiser, visit Attorney General Lisa Madigan's website, www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov, or contact her office's Charitable Trust Bureau at (312) 814-2595 (TTY: 1-800-964-3013).