

Important Tips About Charitable Giving

- ✓ It is important to research charities before you contribute. The percentage of your contribution that a charity spends on fundraising activities, employee salaries, or expenses which do not directly support the charity's stated mission varies greatly by organization.
- ✓ A number of online resources can help you research charities. The Better Business Bureau (give.org) and GuideStar (guidestar.org) provide detailed information about nonprofit organizations. Also, take time to review the organization's own website.
- ✓ Be wary of telephone solicitors asking for contributions. If you are solicited by phone, ask that the individual put their request in writing and provide complete information about the charitable program. Also, ask if the person conducting the solicitation is a volunteer or a paid solicitor.
- ✓ NEVER give your credit card, debit card or bank account information to a telephone solicitor. Also, be particularly cautious of couriers willing to rush out to your home or business to pick up your contribution.
- ✓ If a tax deduction is important to you, make sure the organization has a tax deductible status with the Internal Revenue Service. "Tax exempt," "non-profit" and "tax deductible" mean different things. Just because a solicitor says their organization is non-profit or tax-exempt, that doesn't mean you can legally deduct your contribution. Only "tax deductible" means your contribution is deductible on your income tax return. Make sure you get a receipt which shows the amount of your contribution and states that the contribution is tax deductible. The IRS website (irs.gov/charities) has a searchable database of organizations eligible to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions.
- ✓ Many charitable solicitors ask for contributions of clothing, other household items and vehicles. IRS rules concerning valuations and receipts have changed significantly in recent years; be sure you understand them completely (irs.gov/charities/contributors).
- ✓ Not all organizations with charitable sounding names are actually charities. Many organizations adopt names confusingly similar to well-known charities. Be sure you know exactly who is asking for your contribution.
- ✓ Watch out for organizations that use questionable techniques such as sending unordered merchandise or invoices after you have turned them down for a donation. You are under no obligation to pay for or return items received under these circumstances.
- ✓ Most police and fire departments are funded by tax dollars. However, their unions and social organizations may solicit you for contributions. These groups typically use paid fund-raisers to solicit donations. If you are solicited by an organization using the words "police" or "firefighter," call your local police or fire department to verify that the group is actually supporting the department, and to find out how much of their contributions actually are used for their programs.
- ✓ Be skeptical of organizations which list only post office boxes, "PMB" addresses or mail drop suite numbers.

Citizens can file a complaint against a charitable organization on the Secretary of State's Professional Licensing Boards Division website: <http://www.sos.ga.gov/plb>. If you have additional questions, please call the Georgia Secretary of State's Professional Licensing Boards Division, which oversees charitable organizations, at 478-207-2440.