

Cherished Charities

Top 10 Giving Tips for Maximum Impact

These guidelines from Charity Navigator can help *Natural Awakenings* readers make wise decisions in donating dollars to favorite eco-causes.



1 Be Proactive. First, take the time to identify which environmental results are most important to the family and be specific about the goals you expect via giving.

2 Engage in Dialogue. Before contributing to an organization, talk with staff to learn about the group's accomplishments, goals and challenges.

3 Confirm Nonprofit Status. Check to ensure that the recipient is registered as a public nonprofit charity [501(c) (3)]; this also qualifies donations as tax deductions.

4 Check for Commitment to Accountability and Transparency. Charities that follow good governance and transparency practices are less likely to engage in unethical or irresponsible activities and more likely to be making a measurable difference. Even advocates of big-picture environmental causes will find ways to quantify the quality of their contributions to planetary health.

5 Examine the Charity's Financial Health. The financial health of any organization is a strong indicator of its performance. The most efficient nonprofits invest 75 percent or more of their budgets on programs and services and less than 25 percent on fundraising and administrative fees.

6 Review Executive Compensation. Even eco-charities need to pay their top leaders a competitive salary in order to attract and retain the talent needed to run a viable organization and produce results. But don't just accept the CEO's compensation at face value; compare it with counterparts in organizations of similar size, mission and location.

7 Be Careful of Sound-Alike Names. Don't be confused by a charity that purposely chooses a name strikingly similar to a more reputable, well-known organization.

8 Hang Up the Phone. Recognize that the for-profit fundraising companies often used for charitable telemarketing campaigns keep 25 to 95 cents of every dollar they collect.

9 Concentrate Giving. Choose a few favorite causes to focus on. Spreading donations among multiple organizations can diminish the overall impact, because a percentage of each gift immediately goes toward overhead.

10 Make a Long-Term Commitment. Wise donors support their favorite environmental and other charities over the long haul, because they understand success requires a reliable pool of long-term, committed supporters.

CharityNavigator.com provides ratings and analysis of participating charities as a public service.