

In these sometimes difficult economic times, the average consumer is bombarded from all sides with pleas for charitable contributions. Unfortunately, there are charities that are dishonest about the nature and quality of the services they provide. When you contribute to a charity, you should make sure that the money is used in the same careful, efficient manner as the dollars you spend on your own personal purchases and investments. Consider the following before deciding to contribute to any particular charity:

Before Giving

Know Your Charity

Before you make a donation, ask for written information, including the charity's name, address, and telephone number. A legitimate charity or fundraiser will give you materials outlining the charity's mission, how your donation will be used, and proof that your contribution is tax-deductible.

Call the charity. Find out if the organization is aware of the solicitation and has authorized the use of its name. If not, you may be dealing with a fraudulent solicitor. Some disreputable charities will use a name, symbol, or logo associated with a respected charity in order to take advantage of that charity's reputation. Never donate to a charity unless you have information about it.

Find Out How The Charity Will Spend Your Hard-earned Dollars

Before you donate, find out about the charity's finances and programs. Find out how much of your donation goes to helping people and program services as opposed to fundraising and administrative expenses.

Financial information may be obtained by calling the Pennsylvania Department of State, Bureau of Charitable Organizations.

Also...

Pennsylvania law requires that most charities register with the Department of State Bureau of Charitable Organizations to legally solicit donations in the state.

Bureau of Charitable Organizations

Department of State
207 N. Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120
800-732-0999

www.dos.state.pa.gov

In addition, you can get information on various charities from any of the following organizations:

Charity Navigator

139 Harristown Road, Suite 101
Glen Rock, NJ 07452
201-818-1288

www.charitynavigator.org

helpandsupport@CharityNavigator.org

CharityWatch

P.O. Box 578460
Chicago, IL 60657
773-529-2300

www.charitywatch.org

GuideStar

4801 Courthouse St., Suite 220
Williamsburg, VA 23188
757-229-4631

www.guidestar.org

Telephone Solicitations

Because telephone solicitations are typically conducted by paid professional fundraisers on behalf of the charity, ask the caller if he/she is paid or a volunteer, and how much the charity receives from each dollar donated.

Door-to-Door Solicitations

Demand identification – an honest solicitor will not hesitate to show you credentials. Do not feel pressured to contribute on the spot. If you decide to donate, mail a check directly to the charity.

Unordered Merchandise

You have no obligation to pay for, nor are you required to return Merchandise; greeting cards, address labels, tickets, etc. – that you never asked for and that may be included in a donation appeal. Federal law states that you can keep such unrequested items without making a contribution.

Beware of Sweepstakes

“Guaranteed prizes” often have a value of ten cents or less and probably will not cover the cost of your postage. Read the small print because it will usually reveal that your chance of winning is one in 100,000 or greater. Sweepstakes generally do not provide much benefit to the charity or to you, so think carefully before you participate.

Professional Solicitors

Prior to orally requesting a contribution, or at the time of any written request, professional solicitors are required to clearly and conspicuously disclose their name as on file with the Bureau of Charitable Organizations, that the solicitation is made by a professional solicitor who is being paid for his/her services, the individual's legal name, the legal name of the charity, and a description of how your contribution will be utilized. If a telephone solicitor is hesitant to reveal any of this information, ***you should beware!***

Know Your Charity's Goals

Make sure you agree with the purpose of the charity. You may wish to support a “research” oriented charity, not a “patient service” charity or one that only provides “public education.” Give to a charity that best fits your goals.

Before You Volunteer

Don't agree to solicit for a charity without obtaining information about the charity from the Bureau of Charitable Organizations. Remember, your friends and neighbors will feel pressure to contribute if they are asked by someone they trust. Make sure you earn their trust by thoroughly checking on the charity.

Solicitations for Benefit Shows

If tickets to a benefit show are being sold with the promise of underprivileged children attending for free, ask how many children will attend the event, how they are chosen, whether free transportation will be provided, and if an accompanying adult is also admitted for free. Many "benefit show" sponsors fail to adequately provide for the children or the adult responsible for their care, and often "over-book" events (for example, selling 1,000 tickets for an event that will seat 200 persons).

Do Not Be Pressured Into Giving

Take time to think about your donation. High pressure tactics and sob stories often are the signs of unscrupulous operators.

Method of Payment

If you decide to contribute, pay by check. Make the check out to the charity, not to a company or the individual collecting the donations. **Never** pay cash or use your credit card number in response to a request by a stranger.

Be skeptical if someone thanks you for a pledge you do not remember making. If you have any doubt whether you've made a pledge or previously contributed, check your records. Be on the alert for invoices claiming you've made a pledge when you know you haven't. Some unscrupulous solicitors use this approach to get your money.

Charities and the Do Not Call Registry

The National Do Not Call Registry (www.donotcall.gov) gives you a way to reduce telemarketing calls, but it exempts charities and political groups. However, if a fundraiser is calling on behalf of a charity, you may ask not to get any more calls from, or on behalf of, that specific charity. If those calls continue, the fundraiser may be subject to a fine.

The material in this brochure is for informational purposes only. It is meant to give you general information and not specific legal advice.

Provided as a public service by

*Bucks County
Consumer Protection
and
The Bucks County
Commissioners*

How to Make Your Charitable Dollars Count



County of Bucks Department of Consumer Protection/ Weights and Measures

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**215-348-6060
1-800-942-2669**

**[www.BucksCounty.org/
ConsumerProtection](http://www.BucksCounty.org/ConsumerProtection)**