



## Internet and Social Media Solicitations: Wise-Giving Tips

Charities use a wide variety of methods to solicit charitable donations. New and powerful technologies utilize not just the internet and email, but also social media and mobile phones. Today, a volunteer can create a fundraising page and start soliciting on behalf of a charity in minutes. So, too, can a fraudster. To help donors make wise giving decisions using these media, the California Attorney General offers the following tips for donors.

Online fundraising allows donors to give to numerous causes with the click of a button. In order to make an informed decision about donating online, donors should be aware of the following:

Make sure you are donating to the charity you intend to benefit:

- If you receive an email or text message asking for a donation to a charity, confirm that the request is from the charity, not an imposter, by contacting the charity or visiting its website.
- You can also use the following web resources to learn more about specific charities:
  - the Attorney General's Registry search feature at [www.oag.ca.gov/charities](http://www.oag.ca.gov/charities),
  - IRS Select Check,
  - BBB Wise Giving Alliance,
  - Charity Navigator,
  - GuideStar, and
  - the Foundation Center.
- Be cautious of "look-alike" websites. These fraudulent websites will often ask for personal financial information or may download harmful malware into your computer.
- Watch out for solicitation on behalf of charities whose names are similar to well-known organizations. These "sound-alike" names are often used with the intent of confusing donors.

- Don't assume that charity recommendations on Facebook, blogs, or other social media have been vetted. Research the charity yourself.

#### Peer-to-Peer Fundraising:

- Individuals who wish to support a specific charity or cause can raise money through peer-to-peer fundraising campaigns by setting up fundraising pages on fundraising platform websites. Friends and family members can then be asked to visit the page and make a donation.
- If you want to set up a peer-to-peer fundraising page, please contact the charity you wish to benefit beforehand to get permission to use its name and to make sure the representations you make on your page are correct.
- If you want to make a donation on a peer-to-peer fundraising page, first make sure that your donation is going directly to the charity and not to the individual supporter.
  - Find out what percentage of your donation the charity will actually receive and ask whether you will be charged any fees for making a donation through the fundraising platform website.
  - Find out what the website will do (if anything) with your personal information; be wary of websites that do not provide a privacy policy.

#### Giving via Mobile Phone:

- Donation amounts usually range between \$5 and \$25, although wireless carriers can cap the amount per person, per month, when the level of giving is high (such as after a disaster).
- Find out if normal texting rates apply to your donation.
- Be sure you are comfortable with amount of the donation you have committed to making and that you are not authorizing a recurring donation that will be charged to your phone bill monthly.
- Wireless carriers do not forward the donation to the charity until you pay your bill so consider giving in another way if you want the charity to receive your donation immediately.
- Carriers are prohibited from giving the charity your identifying information. So think about the type of relationship you want to have with the charity. If you want to make gifts that exceed the cap on mobile phone giving, and be a long-term and involved contributor to the charity, consider giving in another way.
- Giving through QR Code and the Square Card Reader:
  - Giving through these methods will allow you to receive an electronic receipt for your contribution and reduces the risks associated with giving cash.
  - Be cautious, however, as anyone can create a QR code or buy Square:
    - Be sure the QR code you scan was provided by the charity and that the person facilitating your Square transaction is actually affiliated with the charity.

- Double-check that you were linked correctly to the website associated with the QR code and that the donation is reaching your intended beneficiary.
- Always check your receipt and credit card/PayPal bill to insure the transaction occurred as you intended.

Additional tips:

- Be particularly vigilant when donating online in the wake of natural disasters and tragedies.
  - Charities formed shortly after a disaster may have the best of intentions but many sham charities pop up immediately after disasters as well, just to take advantage of donors' generosity. Take into consideration that an existing charity is more likely to have the sound management and program experience to quickly and effectively respond to disasters. It will also have a track record so you can review financial filings to satisfy yourself that your donation will be wisely used.
- You may want your donation used for a specific program or purpose within a charity. If a website has a "donate" button, check to see if you can designate a specific purpose for your donation. If you can't, contact the charity to be sure your donation will be spent for the purpose you intend.
- Some charities sell merchandise online and claim that "100% of the proceeds" will benefit the charitable programs they operate. But "100% of the proceeds" does not necessarily mean 100% of the sales price. Contact the charity to ask what percentage of each purchase it will receive. If the charity cannot give you an answer, consider donating another way.

If you are considering making a gift to an individual or family instead of an established charity, please keep the following information in mind:

- Find out if there is a trust or deposit account established for the benefit of the individual or family. Then contact the banking institution to verify the existence of the account, and check locally to confirm that there really is such a need.
- Do not give cash. Contribute by check payable to the fund, not to an individual, and mail directly to the fund.
- Contributions earmarked for relief of a particular individual or family are not tax-deductible, even if they are made to a qualified charitable organization. Ask whether your donation is tax-deductible and verify with your tax advisor or the IRS. Ask for a receipt showing the amount of the contribution and a statement that contributions are tax-deductible. The fact that a charity has a federal employee identification number (FEIN) does not necessarily mean the charity has tax-exempt status.