

An Unconventional Guide to Making a Meaningful Gift This Holiday Season

Here are some original ways to give that reflect your values:

- 1 Say “thank you” to a nonprofit that’s helped you in the past.** Maybe you worked at a nonprofit when you were young where you gained skills and confidence (and a good feature on your resume). Or maybe the Boys & Girls Club or the LGBT Center was an important haven for you. Consider giving one day’s pay (your annual salary divided by 228 days) to that nonprofit. Pay it forward for someone else.
- 2 Consider the nonprofits you already know and appreciate.** For example, where do you volunteer or serve on the board? You can give your gift “in honor of” a staff member or fellow volunteer whose work you appreciate. Think about which nonprofits help you, your family members, and your neighbors. Perhaps your niece gets help from a disabilities nonprofit, your parent belongs to a senior center, or you enjoy a wilderness area, a museum, public radio, or an online encyclopedia.
- 3 Use social media to ask your personal network for recommendations.** For example, use your Facebook page to ask veterans and family members of veterans for recommendations about which veterans assistance organizations they respect.
- 4 If you are thinking about giving to others less fortunate than you – as many of us do during the holiday season –** remember to give not only to the nonprofits that help people, but also to the nonprofits who speak out for them. Consider giving not only to a food pantry but also to a civil rights law center, a domestic violence coalition, or an environmental justice organization.
- 5 Give locally... but also to communities with fewer resources than yours.** If you give to a symphony orchestra in Los Angeles, consider also giving to an orchestra in the Central Valley. If you give to a wilderness preservation area, consider also giving to an environmental justice group in a black or Latino community. If you donate to your alma mater, make a matching donation to a university that may have fewer donors, perhaps a community college. If you aren’t sure where to give, make your donation to a local community foundation or United Way.
- 6 Remember that wildfires and other natural disasters impact people for many years.** Consider pledging monthly donations to organizations that support victims as they recover.



As nonprofits, we rest in the arms of our communities and supporters. Thank you for being there with us.

A few cautions, too:

1 Before giving to an organization you don't know – even a famous one – do some research online. Type the organization's name into Google along with a word such as "problem" or "wrong" to see if there are accusations against the charity, or criticisms of its work. For example, an international nonprofit may have good finances, but a web search reveals that the people in the overseas nation believe the nonprofit is harming local small businesses. (Of course you will have to decide whether any accusations are legitimate and whether or not you agree with any criticisms). You can review the charity's finance reports – typically available for free at www.guidestar.org (not all charities have to provide these reports, called Federal Form 990). Members of the public – such as volunteers and beneficiaries – can also write reviews of charities on Yelp and GreatNonprofits.org.

2 Don't click on links in emails from nonprofits when you want to give – especially well-known nonprofits. Instead type their name directly into your web browser. Scammers send emails with links that go to "look-alike" pages that appear to be legitimate but instead steal your money and your information.

3 Don't give your credit card number over the phone or online to a nonprofit you don't know directly.

4 Don't give to a crowdfunding campaign unless you know someone directly involved. Unfortunately, platforms like GoFundMe have become magnets for scam artists.

5 If you think you've been scammed, give a holiday gift to thousands of other well-meaning people by reporting the scammer to the California Attorney General using this form: <https://oag.ca.gov/charities/complaints>

Remember: California's nonprofits are "hidden in plain sight"

We're not only the homeless shelter or food bank. We're your church, the your local theater group, the senior center, the wildlife rescue volunteers, the Girl Scouts. We are all breathing cleaner air and our children's toys are safer thanks to California's nonprofit environmental and consumer advocates. Those of us who are people of color, women, people with disabilities and LGBT benefit every day from the work of civil rights nonprofits.