

# Holiday giving survival guide

**By Sharon Lipinski**  
Special to the Surveyor

In the 33 days between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, Americans will donate \$100 billion. That's \$300 million every day. This means we receive stacks of junk mail with urgent donation requests, we get endless e-mails that tug at our heart strings, and we run a gauntlet of neighbors and co-workers asking us to chip in for their favorite cause. Everyone wants a piece of that \$100 billion.

Your donation can change the world, but only if it goes to great charities doing great work. Unfortunately, not all charities are created equal. Some are amazing and squeeze the most impact from every penny. Others are dysfunctional, struggling with leadership, vision, and implementation. Some might work on programs that no one wants, don't work, or might actually hurt the very people they're trying to help. Some might be embezzling donations and funding their personal lifestyle with their donor's hard earned money.

How do you know which organization is doing it right? Relax. I'm here to help. Holiday donations just got easier.

Research, research, research  
Research is the golden rule of donating, but for a long time I didn't know how to research a charity.  
Where do I look? What do I look for?  
After a lot of time and effort, I created a Three Level

Evaluation Guide. Depending on how much money I'm going to donate and how much time I want to spend, I can go up or down the scale and I always feel like I'm making an informed decision.

**Level 1: 4 basic questions — to start, always ask the following four questions:**

1. What does the charity do?
2. How do they do it?
3. How do they know they are making a difference?
4. Is that something I want to support? Why?

For example, my Veteran's Giving Circle recently made a donation to Give an Hour.

1. Give an Hour provides free and anonymous mental health services to veterans and their families.
2. They do it by finding mental health professionals who want to donate their time and matching them with veterans who need help.
3. They know they're making a difference because their 6,700 licensed mental health professionals have given more than 94,000 hours of free services.
4. I want to support them because I love supporting our veterans.

On the other hand, I would not support a charity that provides free shoes to people in developing countries, because it fails question number four. I want to support poor people breaking the cycle of poverty, and free shoes can actually make poverty worse. Local shoe manufacturers and retailers cannot compete with free shoes and these small business owners may go out of business.

### Donating as a family

Your children learn about donating money by watching you, by hearing you talk about donating, and being involved in those discussions and activities with you.

This holiday sit down as a family to discuss donating. How much will you donate? How will you choose where to donate?

Then give them the four questions above as homework. Your children can report back to the family on the charities that they discover, and then you can choose where to donate together.

### Create an annual giving plan

While giving may be at the top of our minds during the holiday season, need exists all year.

The homeless need to eat on Jan. 2 as much as they needed to eat Dec. 25. Children need books and supplies when school starts in August. Families fall on hard times all throughout the year.

So, while you're thinking about giving this season, think about how you can give throughout the year, too.

**About the author:** Sharon Lipinski is the Donation Defender and a Generosity Expert. She is a nationwide expert on Giving Circles, a speaker and a military wife. She founded Change Gangs: Virtual Giving Circles to close the gap between the size of your wallet and the size of the impact you can make on the causes you care about most.

Download her "Holiday Giving Survival Guide" which includes the complete Three Level Evaluation Guide and tips on canned food, toy, and clothing drives at [www.changegangs.com/holiday-charitable-donation-survival-guide](http://www.changegangs.com/holiday-charitable-donation-survival-guide).

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