

ON PHILANTHROPY

Bruce DeBoskey: How to maximize your holiday charity donations

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Bruce DeBoskey (*The Denver Post*)

This is the "giving season" — the time of year when many individuals and businesses focus on philanthropy and make their largest contributions to charity. Whether you'll be donating \$25 or \$250,000, there are ways to make your giving more effective in this meaningful and generous time of year.

First, consider these facts:

- In the United States, \$602 billion will be spent during the season that begins with Thanksgiving and extends through Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa.
- In 2012, U.S. charitable giving totaled \$316 billion. Seventy-two percent of this amount came from individuals, 15 percent from foundations, 7 percent from bequests and 6 percent from corporations.
- Nearly 30 percent of all annual giving happens in December, including 10 percent in the last two days of the year.
- Twenty-two percent of online giving happens on Dec. 30 and 31.

For various reasons, many people make their donation decisions as the year comes to a close. Whether you give throughout the year or wait until the end of the year, here are some guidelines for effective philanthropy:

Examine your reasons for giving. Determine which causes inspire your passion and which results you'd like to achieve with your giving. Often, people give to charities based on habit or family tradition, or because an acquaintance or friend supports the cause. When deciding where to donate, make sure that the nonprofit engages in work that is most important to you.

Involve your family. Talk with other family members, across the generations, to learn what matters to each and which values you share. Consider setting aside a portion of the money used to buy holiday gifts for one another and contributing it to a common cause that reflects your shared values. Put favorite charities on your gift list, and ask others for theirs.

Research nonprofits. Make sure any nonprofit selected to receive your money is approved by the IRS as a 501(c)(3). Look at financial reports on the organization's website. Review IRS Form 990 filings, available online. See how the charity rates at sites such as charitynavigator.org, givewell.org, greatnonprofits.org, myphilanthropedia.org and bbb.org/us/charity.

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Ask "so what?" Most nonprofits boast admirable mission statements that include important, unassailable goals. But do their funded activities achieve these goals and make a difference? What outcomes has the charity achieved, and where has it fallen short?

Don't donate over the phone or at the front door. In Colorado, paid solicitors collected more than \$187 million in donations in 2007. Of this total, less than half reached the intended charitable organizations. Paid telephone and door-to-door solicitors operate in every state. Some are legitimate, but it is difficult to be sure. If a charity is soliciting you over the phone or by ringing your doorbell, let it ring. Also, be wary of sound-alike names masking fraudulent solicitations. Check some of these out at tampabay.com/topics/specials/worst-charities1.page.

Go deep, not wide. No matter how much you give, it is better to give boldly to a few nonprofits than to give smaller amounts to a large number of nonprofits. Pay attention to legitimate matching-gift opportunities, and consider making a two- or three-year pledge.

Contribute your time and talent. Volunteering with a nonprofit is one of the best ways to really familiarize yourself with an organization's work. Volunteering makes it possible for all people to meaningfully contribute, regardless of income level. For local opportunities, see metrovolunteers.org or unitedwaydenver.org.

Start early in 2014. Think of your philanthropy as another type of investment — one that seeks a social rather than a financial return. Research, develop a strategy, diversify, contribute and evaluate. For significant gifts, seek advice from experts, and thoughtfully consider your donation options.

Following these steps will help you achieve better outcomes for the causes or organizations you care most about. In addition, reflecting the spirit of the season, it will help you find more joy, meaning and satisfaction in your philanthropy.

Bruce DeBoskey is a Colorado-based philanthropic strategist working with the DeBoskey Group to help businesses, foundations and families design and implement thoughtful philanthropic strategies and actionable plans. More at deboskeygroup.com.

Nonprofit of the month

Colorado Gives Day: 24 Hours to Give Where You Live. Colorado Gives Day returns Tuesday for a 24-hour blitz to raise money for Colorado nonprofits. Last year, \$15.7 million was distributed. Visit ColoradoGives.org, where you can search for your favorite nonprofits, find new ones and make donations all in one place. You can even preschedule your donation. Colorado Gives Day is made possible by Community First Foundation and FirstBank.