



## CHARITIES DISASTER RELIEF GUIDE

In the wake of a disaster, people are often deeply moved to find a way to aid their fellow citizens. Giving to charities is one of the most common ways of offering help, but finding an appropriate charity in the aftermath of a disaster can be difficult or even confusing. Others may want to establish new charities, and existing charities will receive and seek donations to aid in the response to a disaster. This guide offers some suggestions and advice both for those who wish to make charitable donations as well as for those new or existing charities involved in raising funds for disaster relief.

The Attorney General is charged with protecting charitable assets and ensuring that gifts directed for any public or charitable purpose are used only as intended by the donors. The Attorney General also works in cooperation with the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection, to enforce state laws regulating solicitations for donations from the public that are represented to be for any public or charitable purpose. Together we stand ready to protect donor intent by overseeing charitable solicitations and taking swift action against those making fraudulent solicitations or misappropriating funds in violation of donor intent.

While no single tragedy is identical to any other, regulators, charities, and the community all need to work together to ensure a thoughtful and consolidated response to disaster relief. Adhering to established law and guiding principles in the pre-planning stage will help guide the implementation process.

**Guidance for Donors:** Our offices offer the following suggestions for donating in the wake of a disaster:

- Donate to well-known, established charities. It is the best way to ensure that your donation is used appropriately. Find a charity with a proven track record that is doing the type of work that you want to support.
- When giving to any organization, specify the purpose of your donation and do so in writing whenever possible.
- Be extra cautious when responding to e-mail and telephone solicitations on behalf of supposed victims. These methods of solicitation are more likely to be part of a scam.

- Delete unsolicited e-mails and don't open attachments, even if they claim to contain video or photographs. The attachments may be viruses designed to steal personal financial information from your computer.
- Watch carefully for copycat organizations. Criminals are likely to set up bogus sites to steal the identities and donations of generous, unsuspecting individuals. When giving online, be sure to find the charity's legitimate website. You can access accurate links to the sites of each bona fide charity at Charity Navigator ([www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)).
- Social media sites can also perpetuate scams. Exercise caution in giving via these vehicles. Investigate the groups behind such pleas to ensure that they come from a legitimate organization. Make sure you evaluate the charity in the same way you would if the charity was not touted in the social media.
- Both the need for donations and the opportunity for giving will be present for some time. Therefore, do not feel pressured into making contributions; reputable charities do not use coercive tactics. If you feel pressured at all, you may be at risk of being scammed.
- Do not give your personal or financial information to anyone who solicits contributions.
- Avoid cash donations if possible. Pay by credit card, or write a check directly to the charity.
- Do not make checks payable to individuals.
- Note also that not all contributions are tax deductible. If you want to ensure that your contribution is tax deductible, confirm this with the charity, the IRS and your tax advisor.

The Department of Consumer Protection maintains information on the registration status of a charity on the Department's website, <https://www.elicense.ct.gov>. The website also displays information about any active solicitation campaign on behalf of the charity by paid solicitors, including the identity of the paid solicitor and the minimum guaranteed percentage of donations that will be paid to the charity.

Additional information is also available at Charity Navigator, <http://www.charitynavigator.org>; the Federal Trade Commission: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/charityfraud>; and the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance at <http://www.bbb.org/us/charity>.

**Communicating with Donors:** One of the biggest challenges charities face in the wake of a tragedy is ensuring transparency and maintaining donor confidence with respect to disaster relief donations. Plan ahead for disaster relief fundraising by developing protocols and a comprehensive plan that can be quickly implemented when disaster strikes. We urge charities to consider the following:

- Ensure donations are used in a manner consistent with donor intent. Establish a system and methodology that documents and facilitates receipt of donations in an efficient and expedient manner. Where there may be restricted donations, particularly in the wake of a tragedy or disaster, make sure these funds are adequately identified and segregated.

- Embrace transparency by disclosing and publicizing financial information to allow donors to make informed giving decisions.
- Communicate clearly and openly with donors, the public and regulators. Stress consistency and clarity in your charitable message. Be clear about the purpose and use of funds to help bolster donor confidence and encourage further giving.
- Distribute funds in a timely manner, but provide a realistic timeframe to do so.
- If you are planning on raising funds on behalf of another organization, seek and secure its written authorization and consent before you begin any fundraising activities.
- Adhere to all local, state and federal reporting requirements regarding registration, solicitations and use of donations.
- Contact the Office of the Attorney General or Department of Consumer Protection with questions and concerns regarding fiduciary responsibilities, solicitation requirements and local state law.

**Solicitation & Registration Requirements:** Connecticut law requires that most organizations and individuals that solicit money for disaster relief purposes register or claim an exemption from registration with the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP). It is unlawful to solicit contributions without being registered. All paid solicitors and some fundraising counsel must register, post a bond and file certain reports. This registration information is available to the public at <https://www.elicense.ct.gov>. For general information about state laws related to the solicitation of charitable funds and registration see the [DCP Website](#).

Additional resources to help Connecticut donors make informed decisions:

- [Connecticut Attorney General Jepsen Cautions Residents on Charitable Giving: Beware of Potential Scams](#)
- [Charity search – is the charity registered?](#)
- [BBB Wise Giving Alliance](#)
- [FTC Warns Consumers: Charity Scams Often Follow Disasters](#)
- [FTC- Consumer Information- Charity Scams](#)
- [Wise Giving Tips for Internet and Social Media Solicitations](#)
- [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#)
- [Charity Navigator](#)

- [Guidestar](#)

**Guidance on Governance and Best Practices for Non Profits:** Guidance on setting up your Connecticut non-profit in the wake of a disaster and implementing good governance and best practices:

- [IRS- Disaster Relief Resources for Charities and Contributors](#)
- [IRS- Publication 3833: "Disaster Relief: Providing assistance through charitable organizations"](#)
- [IRS- Webinar on "Starting and Operating Charities for Disaster Relief"](#)
- Guidance on Best Practices: [Connecticut Association of Non Profits](#)
- Guidance on Governance: [Connecticut Association of Non Profits; Panel on the Non Profit Sector; IRS information on Governance and related topics](#)
- Suggested guidelines for setting up a charity: [Starting & Building a Nonprofit; Starting a Nonprofit; IRS Info on "How to Apply to be Tax Exempt"](#)
- [Stayexempt.irs.gov](#) – an IRS site created especially for 501(c)(3) organizations wishing to maintain their tax exempt status

**Relationship Building:** Before engaging in fundraising, we encourage individuals and organizations to seek informed guidance on fundraising and operational best practices. Identify and connect with local organizations, state regulators and professionals who are knowledgeable about fundraising, as well as leaders who can identify a community's needs in the event of a disaster. This may be a fluid group whose members are engaged depending on the nature of the disaster and suited to the various stages of recovery. The community's needs should be reassessed regularly to ensure needs continue to be met. If you anticipate raising funds on behalf of another organization, reach out to its leadership and be sure to secure its written authorization and consent before you begin any fundraising activities.

- [Community Foundations in Connecticut](#)
- [Connecticut Council for Philanthropy](#)

**Legislation:** In response to the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012, Governor Malloy proposed legislation to create the Connecticut Coordinated Assistance and Recovery Endowment ([CT CARE](#)) Fund for victims of disasters and other emergencies. If called into action, the Fund will establish separate accounts restricted to each emergency, as well as a separate endowment for operations and sustainability. This approach is intended to ensure that 100% of the donations for a specific tragedy or emergency are used for relief related to that specific event. The legislated infrastructure is intended to be the primary repository available

immediately to receive private donations in response to an emergency or disaster, to account for those donations, and to distribute the dollars in accordance with the intent of the donors.

**Additional Resources:**

- [FEMA- Disaster Survivor Assistance](#)

Please call us with any questions, concerns or complaints:

**To contact the Office of the Attorney General:**

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55 Elm Street  
P.O. Box 120  
Hartford, CT 06141-0120

Telephone: 860-808-5318  
Facsimile: 860-808-5387  
Email: [attorney.general@ct.gov](mailto:attorney.general@ct.gov)  
Facebook: [Attorney General George Jepsen](#)  
Twitter: [@AGJepsen](#)

**To contact the Department of Consumer Protection/Public Charities Unit:**

Public Charities  
Department of Consumer Protection  
165 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Telephone: 860-713-6170  
Facsimile: (860) 713-7229  
Email: [ctcharityhelp@ct.gov](mailto:ctcharityhelp@ct.gov) (for other questions or assistance)