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Nonprofit Newsletter Fall 2017 - Disaster Relief: Donors Take Heed

In light of the recent devastation caused by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, donors are rushing to provide relief for hurricane victims and rebuilding efforts in Houston, Florida, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

While support from across the country has been incredible, donors should maintain vigilance so as not to give to fly-by-night "charities" set up to take advantage of the public's generosity.

Donors should be wary of unsolicited emails and text messages from individuals claiming to be victims of the disasters and should avoid giving directly to such individuals. Instead, donors should contribute to qualified charities involved in disaster relief efforts, which are better equipped to identify individual victims and direct assistance and aid appropriately.

When donating online, donors should directly type an organization's website address in the address bar of the web browser rather than clicking on an e-mail link that may lead to a fraudulent website. If there is any doubt as to whether an organization's website is legitimate, it is best to call the charity to confirm the correct address.

Websites such as GuideStar and Charity Navigator have databases that allow donors to vet and compare charities. Donors can find information on a charity's expenses, assets and revenue as well as its programs.

Maximizing your contribution

Local or national?

Donors will weigh local charities that may better know the area against national disaster relief charities (such as the American Red Cross) that may have a wider reach. If one is unfamiliar with a local charity, the charity's website is a useful tool for understanding how the charity will use the donations it receives.

Texting – an effective way to give?

Making a donation to a charity by texting and having the phone company charge it later to your phone bill may seem like a quick and effective way to donate, but the reality is that charities often have to wait for phone companies to release the money. Donating directly to a charity is the best way to ensure money is received as soon as it is donated.

Check out matching opportunities

Corporations and employers may have matching opportunities in place that will match dollars given to a certain charity or charities. Facebook says it will match every dollar raised through its service, up to $1 million, for the Center for Disaster Philanthropy's Hurricane Harvey Recovery Fund. Google, meanwhile, is matching $1 million in donations to the American Red Cross. Think about exploring matching opportunities to maximize the impact of your donation.

There are many ways to give, and charities will be eager to receive. Regardless of how you give, your support will always be appreciated.

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