



How to help during the COVID-19 pandemic

by Kim Laughton—President, Schwab Charitable

The global coronavirus pandemic has affected our families and communities in numerous ways. In this time of upheaval and uncertainty, many are wondering how they can help. With almost two million nonprofits in the U.S., including thousands of local community foundations, it can be overwhelming to know where to start.

The following four steps, which were developed by the Effective Philanthropy Learning Initiative at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society in conjunction with Schwab Charitable, can help you identify your giving priorities and guide your search for charities that are offering support and relief during this disaster.

1 Pinpoint your charitable giving priorities.

Organizations across the country are responding to the spread of COVID-19, and it may be difficult to choose a charity to support without first having a clear understanding of your priorities. Take time to reflect on what you hope to achieve. If you already have a track record of charitable giving, reviewing your giving history and looking for themes in past behavior can help.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF INCLUDE:

- Is there a particular need stemming from the coronavirus pandemic that is especially relevant to me? Response efforts are currently focused in two broad areas: public health and helping communities through economic instability. To help you understand the current response to COVID-19, [Candid](#) has created a webpage that combines news items and a funding summary with funding opportunities. For additional perspective on battling COVID-19 locally, nationally and globally, see the recent [webinar](#) hosted by Stanford Social Innovation Review that I joined with leaders from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Does a particular community of people or region have special meaning for me? There are numerous nonprofit organizations, from local community foundations to international aid groups, that will help direct funds where they will have the most impact. To help donors determine how to be most effective during this time, [Giving Compass](#) has created a roundup of guidance from leaders across the nonprofit sector.
- Can I combine financial support with my time? Although much of the country is practicing remote work and social distancing, many charities, such as food and blood banks, will still need to rely on volunteers. Neighbors who should not or cannot leave their homes may also need assistance. Schwab Charitable's [website](#) offers three simple strategies for determining what combination of money, time, and skills will fulfill your philanthropic goals. To help you think through the effects of this unprecedented crisis, Stanford Social Innovation Review is curating a [series of articles](#) with thoughts from social change leaders about the systemic, operational, and strategic challenges created by COVID-19.

Addressing these questions and considerations will help you create a philanthropic focus during this time of need.

2 Identify charities supporting those impacted by the coronavirus.

Once you have identified your giving priorities, it is important to familiarize yourself with the nonprofits making a difference before deciding on a charity to support.

Schwab Charitable has partnered with the Center for Disaster Philanthropy to [curate a list](#) of charities helping support those impacted by the coronavirus. The list includes general COVID-19 relief funds, charities providing food and shelter to those in need, charities offering medical support, educational resource organizations, and charities offering small business assistance. The Center for Disaster Philanthropy's [webpage](#) on COVID-19 is also regularly updated and includes an overview of the evolving health situation, guidance on identifying charities and links to additional resources.

If you are looking to support a specific geographic region within the United States, community foundations have invaluable knowledge and resources to help donors maximize the impact of their support in local communities affected by the spread of COVID-19. The Schwab Charitable website has resources for directing support locally, including a link to The Council on Foundations' [search tool](#) for community foundations working in regions across the U.S. and a resource developed by Giving Compass and the National Center for Family Philanthropy identifying [COVID-19 funds](#) offered by community foundations and other intermediaries.

Tapping personal and professional networks is also a great way to explore charities. Consider asking family or friends with relevant experience about which organizations they support or are familiar with. For example, a friend who is a healthcare worker may have insights about organizations that provide medical resources.

Once you have an understanding of the nonprofit landscape, you will be well-positioned to create a shortlist of organizations aligned with your charitable giving priorities and goals.

3 Understand approaches for maximizing impact.

It is also important to understand how each organization on your shortlist will advance change and measure impact.

Nonprofits typically address change in one of three ways: by providing goods and services, by promoting knowledge, or through advocacy and movement-building.

- **Organizations that provide goods and services** directly to those impacted by the coronavirus may have the most capital-intensive needs as they try to secure and deliver critical supplies and services. This includes not only healthcare organizations but also those that support vulnerable populations such as workers who have lost their jobs or families and individuals who need to take extra precautions with social distancing because of age or pre-existing conditions.
- **Organizations that support the generation and dissemination of research and applied knowledge.** Research into SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 vaccines and antivirals is essential to reduce future infections and fatalities.
- **Advocacy and movement-building organizations** address structural and systemic changes. For example, nonprofit organizations are working with lawmakers on policies designed to help communities weather economic instability through paid time off, sick leave, business loans, unemployment benefits and protection from eviction and utility shutoffs.

Schwab Charitable's webpage on the stages and approaches to [disaster relief efforts](#) provides additional perspective on the scope of disasters and the needs that arise during their various stages.

4

Evaluate and vet your shortlist.

Now that you've narrowed down a small group of charities, thoroughly vetting charities can give you confidence that your funding decisions will have a positive impact on the response to the coronavirus.

To vet a charity, keep the following key considerations and questions in mind:

- U.S. nonprofits can be registered as various types of 501(c)(3) organizations. Is the organization legally registered as a charitable organization?
- An organization's track record is indicative of its experience. Does the organization have any negative press coverage about its history or experience?
- An organization should be clear about its goals and approach. Has the organization's strategy and vision for addressing the coronavirus situation been articulated?
- Programs should allow an organization to meaningfully engage with the target population. Are programs or services for this initiative specific to disaster relief goals?
- Senior staff and board members should have experience and knowledge relevant to the organization's goals.
- An organization must be strategic about its financial health, fundraising from a diversified stream of donors and tracking and managing its budget efficiently. Is the organization transparent about its financials and funding needs?
- To maximize impact and efficiency, organizations should track program outcomes and obtain continuous feedback to inform their current and future work.

Some of these questions can be answered by looking at the organizations' websites or searching [GuideStar](#), [Charity Navigator](#) and [Charity Watch](#) for details about programs, results and financials. Other questions require deeper engagement with the nonprofits and experts in the field. Depending on what information you uncover, keep in mind that not all potential red flags are deal breakers. If something gives you pause, assess whether it is a result of a contained challenge, such as an executive director in transition, or a more pervasive problem, such as a lack of program data or focus.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS CHOOSING THE "RIGHT" CHARITY

It has been amazing to see so many people and organizations come together – virtually – to offer resources and support during these unprecedented times. Schwab Charitable donors are helping thousands of charities respond to COVID-19 and they continue to look for new ways to support relief and recovery efforts.

With so many charities involved, it is natural to feel overwhelmed. You will probably identify many organizations whose work aligns with your charitable goals. No single charity is the only "right" decision. Amid all this uncertainty, any help you are able to provide is important and appreciated.

We encourage Schwab Charitable donors to submit grant recommendations online by logging into their Schwab Charitable accounts and designating a grant for "Coronavirus Relief and Response" from the dropdown menu under the "Purpose of Grant" section. For more information on managing the process and identifying charities to support in a systematic way to increase your impact where it matters most, visit schwabcharitable.org.

Resources mentioned in this article

Candid

Formed by the merger of the Foundation Center and GuideStar, this leading information source for the nonprofit sector has combined a funding summary and news items with funding opportunities on its “Funding for coronavirus (COVID-19)” webpage.

<https://candid.org/explore-issues/coronavirus>

Center for Disaster Philanthropy

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy’s webpage on “COVID-19 Coronavirus” includes an overview of the evolving health situation, guidance on identifying charities and links to additional resources.

<https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disaster/2019-ncov-coronavirus>

Charity Navigator

Charity Navigator rates U.S. charities on financial health and their accountability and transparency based on an examination of financial documents.

<https://www.charitynavigator.org>

Charity Watch

Charity Watch evaluates the efficiency, accountability and governance of nonprofit organizations based on tax filings and audited financial statements.

<https://www.charitywatch.org>

Council on Foundations

As a center of knowledge and leadership for philanthropic organizations, the Council on Foundations has created a “Community Foundation Locator” that helps donors identify community foundations in their area.

<https://www.cof.org/community-foundation-locator>

Giving Compass

Using guided experiences and philanthropic content to help donors give with impact, Giving Compass has created a “Coronavirus Resources For Donors” webpage that contains guidance from leaders across the philanthropic sector on how donors can be most effective during this time.

<https://givingcompass.org/article/coronavirus-resources-for-donors>

GuideStar

GuideStar provides details about the programs, operations and finances of nonprofits gathered from public sources, organizations that promote philanthropy, and the nonprofits themselves.

<https://www.guidestar.org>

National Center for Family Philanthropy

This national source of knowledge and expertise on family philanthropy has collaborated with Giving Compass to create a map that helps donors identify COVID-19 relief funds for geographic locations across the U.S.

https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1nbceydaV515ERWJ3TtqsWN0I_s0bF_1z&ll=40.34002604904353%2C-106.69519983019848&z=4

Schwab Charitable

The Schwab Charitable website helps donors “Identify Resources to Donate” with strategies for combining money, time, and skills to fulfill their philanthropic goals.

https://www.schwabcharitable.org/public/charitable/maximize_your_impact/develop_a_giving_strategy/identify_your_resources

Our webpage on how to “Help disaster victims on their road to recovery” provides additional perspective on the scope of disasters and the needs that arise during their various stages.

https://www.schwabcharitable.org/public/charitable/maximize_your_impact/disaster_relief

A page dedicated to helping “Maximize your charitable impact: COVID-19” includes a list of charities developed with the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, community foundation relief funds, and other funding opportunities with links to additional resources.

<https://mkt.schwabcharitable.org/COVID-19.html>

Finally, Schwab Charitable joined Stanford Social Innovation Review, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in a webinar to discuss how resources are being deployed locally and globally.

https://ssir.org/webinars/entry/global_perspectives_on_philanthropic_efforts_to_battle_covid_19

Stanford Social Innovation Review

Stanford University’s magazine and website dedicated to social change has curated “Rethinking Social Change in the Face of Coronavirus,” a series of articles with insights from around the globe about the systemic, operational, and strategic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

https://ssir.org/rethinking_social_change_in_the_face_of_coronavirus

Giving is good.
Giving wisely
is great.

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