

A Guide To Smart Giving

By Raymon Cancino, Chief Executive Officer, Community Bridges

Every year during the holiday season, I get questions from friends and family on how to ensure their donation is being used effectively. In the wake of recent events, I know many are looking to give back, and thought this advice would be useful for others to see as well.

As a non-profit chief executive officer and a donor, I have been on both sides of the fence. Here are the five most important things I've learned about smart giving:

...

Give with your heart

The first step is contributing to agencies that align with your values, and help to realize the change you wish to see. But it's important to go beyond just name recognition, and really learn what organizations are out there in your community, and which ones are making the biggest impact in the causes you believe in.

Give locally

According to the 2015 Giving USA report, one in five donations from Santa Cruz County residents go to inter-

national organizations. By keeping your contributions local, you're not only helping your neighbors and friends, you're making a ripple effect in the health of local employment rates and businesses.

And with one in five Santa Cruz County residents living in poverty, you don't have to look far to see where you can make a difference. The saying is true: our community is only as strong as its most vulnerable.



Give efficiently

The best nonprofits are committed to transparency and evaluation. You can get a deeper understanding of an agency's effectiveness in the following ways:

Gather Information: Use Charity Navigator and GuideStar to help research effective non-profits. Non-profits are legally required to disclose their 990

forms to the public, where you can get basic information like executive compensation, lobbying efforts, and marketing costs. These forms can be found on many non-profit websites, or through a simple Google search.

Ensure Governance: Non-profits that are committed to transparency and accountability have committees of local professionals who are helping to manage the organization. Review the notes and see if they are asking the right questions. They should be available online or on their website.

Check Marketing: Although marketing is an essential part of any business, ensure that the spending is tapered enough so that expenses are not taking away from direct services.

Compare Administration Costs: No non-profit can efficiently run without appropriately compensated staff to run it. But ask yourself: for the size of the staff, and financial and overall responsibility, are the administration costs reasonable? You can find this information under the

organization's 990 forms and can see what other professionals are earning to get a sense of the going rate.

Effectiveness: The easiest measure is: how many people does this program or agency touch? But an equally as important question is: how deep does the agency impact people's lives, and how much time do they spend working with clients?



Raymon Cancino

Pay Equity: As non-profits, we have a moral responsibility to practice what we preach. A simple way to measure equity is the ratio between the lowest paid worker and the highest paid worker. Most non-profits are within a 1 to 5 ratio. The lower the number, the more equitable the pay distribution is. At Community Bridges, our ratio is 1 to 3.6.

"Giving" page 10

...

Give specifically

Although it can require more work on the non-profit's side, restricting your gift to a specific aspect allows you ultimate control. Over time, and as you build trust with an organization, offering

general donations is a wonderful way for an organization to strengthen the most-needed areas. But start out by testing the waters, and watch how your donation is put to work.

And if you can spare it, give your time, too
The steps above will teach you the technicalities of the organizations you

wish to support. But nothing beats seeing the impact of your support in action. Whether you stop by for a tour, volunteer, or serve on a committee, take the time to listen to the participants, staff and supporters of the organizations you care about. It will open your eyes in ways you never dreamed.

I feel lucky to live in a community of such dedicated and passionate people. My hope is that this guide can help you choose the most impactful ways to put your generosity and good nature to use. When we work together for the common good, anything is possible. ■