

Nine Questions You Should Ask Every Nonprofit

A guide to help you choose the right nonprofits



Learning more about the nonprofits you support will help you feel confident that you are choosing effective organizations—and that your support is really making a difference. This worksheet will help you have a brief conversation or email exchange with a nonprofit to uncover key information about the organizations you are considering supporting. It doesn't take a lot of time to reach out. And most nonprofits will not only be able to answer these questions easily, they will also welcome inquiries that help prospective or current donors learn more about what they do.

Tip: If you don't have a contact at the organization already, reach out to either the general number or email address listed on the website or to the number for the development team.

Set the stage

Let them know who you are and your interest in supporting organizations that align with your target issue or interest area.

Example: I'd really like to learn more about the work you do, and I wanted to speak to someone who can answer a few questions for me. It will take about 20 minutes. Would you be able to help, or is there someone on the development team I can speak with?

Learn about programs and goals

I'd like to start by asking a few questions about the work you do.

- What's your most successful program and why? Give me your best example of the way you've seen your organization's work make a difference?
- What are areas of opportunity for your organization? What could you do better?
- Do you have a strategic plan? What key things are you trying to accomplish in that plan?
- Is there anything that you wish more people knew about your organization or the issues you are trying to solve?

Notes

Learn about resourcing and opportunities

Now I'd like to better understand how you are funded and what your greatest needs are.

- Where does most of your funding come from? What percentage of your budget comes from private donations, and what do private donations help you to do that your other sources of funding don't cover?
- What are your most urgent needs?
- What would make the greatest difference in helping your organization get better at what it does?

Notes



Learn how they engage supporters

I'd like to wrap up by finding out a little more about how you involve your supporters.

- If I wanted to get to know the organization better, what are the best ways to learn more?
- How do you keep your supporters up to date about your work?

Notes

Don't forget: Thank the organization for its time!

Go Deeper

The nine questions above provide a foundation for understanding a charity and its needs. As your level of support or involvement increases, you may want to ask some additional questions.

Some ideas for future conversations:

- How do you measure and report on the effectiveness of your programs?
Do you have any plans to change or improve your evaluation process?
- What are the main obstacles that stand between you and your mission, and how do you plan to overcome them?
- Do you regularly have the resources to cover your budget? Why or why not?
- How would you compare your programs and results to others working in the same field?
- What is your staff really good at? What are gaps?
- What are the steps you are taking to achieve your strategic goal?
- How do you work with peers who address similar issues?
How do you mobilize others around your mission?
- How can I get more involved?

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