

Charitable Solicitations and the Better Business Bureau

The Charity Information Service (CIS) was formed by the Better Business Bureau (BBB) and a committee composed of representatives of corporate foundations and non-profit organizations. The CIS was developed in response to a need for the general public to have reliable information available when making a charitable donation decision. Prior to the inception of the CIS, there was no comprehensive information service available to the public that enabled donors to make intelligent and informed giving decisions.

Background: What Is The BBB?

The BBB serving Eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois is a non-profit corporation founded in 1917. Originally, the BBB was established by the Advertising Club to eliminate fraud in advertising, but since then has expanded to monitor other business practice areas.

BBB Mission

The mission of the BBB, serving Eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois, is to help make the entire region a better place in which to live, work, and do business by encouraging positive business practices.

Questions and Answers

Q Why do we need a Charity Information Service?

A Area residents and business people are generous individuals who want to know that the largest possible portion of their donated money goes to the cause for which it was intended. And there is a strong demand for charitable information – thousands of consumers and business owners call the BBB asking for information on various non-profits. Thus, the CIS will help donors solve a problem – distinguishing the responsible and accountable organizations from the fraudulent and mismanaged.

In a general sense, its role is a kind of partnership with donors and philanthropic organizations in pursuit of the goals we all share: to strengthen public confidence in the voluntary sector and private giving by promoting the responsible use of funds.

Q What charitable organizations are evaluated by the BBB?

A The BBB sends questionnaires, evaluates, and produces reports on local organizations that solicit public funds and are considered public charities with 501 (c)(3) status by the Internal Revenue Service. In certain instances, however, the BBB will investigate and provide reports on organizations that solicit under the guise of a charity or professional fund raising entities that

solicit donations on behalf of charities.

Q What are the Standards of the CIS and how were they developed?

A Standards for Charity Accountability, published by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, were adopted for use by the committee after critical review. Those standards include governance and oversight, measuring effectiveness, finances, and fund raising and informational material.

Q Who can request information on a charitable organization and in what form?

A Anyone who calls, writes or visits the BBB's website will receive information as to whether or not an organization meets standards; and if it does not, why. Organizations generating a large number of inquiries or complaints may have a detailed report. Additionally, a newsletter will include a list of soliciting organizations, whether they meet standards, and any other pertinent information.

Q Does the CIS recommend organizations that meet standards?

A Like the BBB, the CIS does not recommend or endorse any organization, but *does* report factual, unbiased information.

Benefits of the CIS Program

We believe our Charity Information Service can play a vital role in today's burgeoning philanthropic sector by establishing a framework of trust between donors and non-profit organizations in the same way that the BBB currently brings buyers and sellers together.

There are three major categories of CIS benefits.

1. Education

- Aids donors in making informed giving decisions through BBB charity reports
- Provides general information about charitable giving and the non-profit sector.
- Publicizes the activities of those engaged in unscrupulous fundraising activities

2. Public Service / Member Service

Valuable to members and the community at large by ensuring that the greatest possible proportion of donated money goes to the cause for which it was intended.

3. Self - Regulation

Plays a key role in the self-regulation of the non-profit sector by implementing voluntary standards for accountability.

**Take The Time To Give
Wisely**
