

Responding to disasters

How to help make sure your donations are used as you intend—and have the greatest positive impact possible

The Philanthropy Centre at J.P. Morgan



Many people want to help alleviate the suffering and need created by natural and conflict-related disasters. But donating effectively can be challenging during crises, as information coming from the field can be inaccurate, and charities available to receive donations for a disaster may suddenly seem to proliferate.

To assist you in your giving, The Philanthropy Centre at J.P. Morgan is pleased to offer these guidelines for your consideration:

1. Know the charity you are supporting

Ideally, your donation can be made through existing registered charities. Look for charities that have proven track records of success in disaster management and/or familiarity with the target region. When looking for these organizations, you may also be able to find charities that marry your existing philanthropic goals with needs that emerged from the disaster.

If you choose to work with a new charity created specifically to deal with the current crisis, be sure to obtain from the organization, proof that it has applied for its 501(c)3 status with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service or that it is using a registered, fully functional fiscal sponsor to gather funds.

When assessing an organization, consider factors such as:

- Quality of the leadership and governing board
- Relationships with local government and other nonprofits
- Capacity to manage funds
- Ability to assess the needs on the ground

2. Recognize that disaster-related needs evolve over time

Keep in mind both the short- and the long-term needs of affected areas. Immediate assistance, such as emergency shelter and supplies, is critical right after the catastrophe. Long-term assistance, such as projects aimed at planning, reconstruction and mental health support, is vital for rebuilding and maintaining healthy communities over time.

Most disaster fundraising efforts decline dramatically within six months after the disaster. Donors often expect those resources to be deployed immediately, but that may not always be the case. This may lead to frustration for both the donor and the recipient.

As a donor, consider the following:

- Emergency supplies are essential. Find out if distribution channels for emergency supplies have been established and have been coordinated across charities and government departments to ensure that people with the greatest needs are reached first.
- Needs often vary from neighborhood to neighborhood. News reports and social media may not fully represent the actual experience across an entire disaster region. Resource deployment may seem slower than expected, but may not reflect realities on the ground.
- Crises tend to exacerbate existing social issues. Continue to educate yourself on opportunities that may emerge from increased attention to issues you are passionate about.

3. Keep track of results

Set clear expectations for your gift so that your donation is used for the purposes you intend. In addition, expect charities to provide frequent reports both on current needs and on their responses. If you have contributed significant funds to an organization, consider conducting a site visit or requesting a meeting with leadership three to six months after the donation to learn how your donation is being used.

Helping people who are in great peril is one of the most intrinsic forms of philanthropy. As you develop your plan for giving during crises, your J.P. Morgan team is available as a resource and sounding board for ideas.

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