

At a Glance

Who we are

The Charities Review Council is an independent resource for people who make contributions to support charities. We are dedicated to empowering you in making informed and thoughtful giving decisions, so that you can be more effective in helping charities advance their important community work. No other state has a similar independent resource for donors.

What we do

The Charities Review Council:

- Provides tools and resources to the giving public to make informed giving choices:
 - Online searchable charity review results
 - Tips on how to give smart and safe
 - Information on donating auto and goods
 - Nonprofit accountability standards and resources
- Reviews charities through its Accountability Wizard. Results of these reviews help the public determine the trustworthiness of a charity before giving. Review results are posted online at SmartGivers.org.
- Serves as educator to charities by providing tools and resources to organizations to meet and maintain the Council's Accountability Standards.

Our Mission & Vision

The Council's mission is simple: to mobilize informed donors and accountable nonprofits for the greater good. The Council pursues this mission by:

- Engaging people in informed charitable giving to promote effective generosity.
- Encouraging and assisting accountability and transparency in nonprofits.
- Enabling thoughtful and responsible use of philanthropic resources.

We envision vibrant and healthy communities for all, benefiting from effective and trustworthy nonprofits that are supported by a well-informed public's generosity.

Our Values:

Generosity – The spirit of generosity that results from increased public trust in nonprofits;

Informed Giving – People making informed giving decisions that promote the common good;

Diversity - The contribution of all cultures in the mosaic of healthy, vibrant communities;

Accountable Nonprofits – The significant accomplishments that result from accountable and transparent nonprofits;

Integrity – Uncompromising integrity in ourselves and others.

How you can help

For charities to effectively pursue their public missions, they must be well managed and accountable. You can help charities advance their important community work by expecting accountability of the charities you support.

Encourage friends, family and neighbors to make independent thoughtful decisions about charitable giving by researching organizations before giving.

Invite charities that interest you to participate in a public Council review. An invitation from donors like you will let the charity know that an Accountability Wizard review is important to their donors.

Meets Standards Seal



Look for the Meets Standards seal. Reviewed charities that meet the Council's Accountability Standards are granted the use of the seal in their newsletters, Web sites and other publications. The seal provides a public, concise and accessible indicator of a charity's commitment to accountable and ethical practices.

**INFORMATION AT YOUR FINGERTIPS.
ONE CLICK OR CALL AWAY.**

- www.SmartGivers.org
- (651) 224-7030 or 800-733-GIVE

The Council's original standards stated that:

- Organizations must have an active and responsible governing body.
- They must have a legitimate purpose and reasonable efficiency of operation.
- They must have an itemized budget with audited accounts, reasonable campaign expenses and be willing to cooperate with other groups.

Standards Revision

In 1998, the Council revised its standards to cover issues like length-of-term limits for board members; a board-approved budget; a conflict of interest policy applicable to all board members; and a requirement that charitable organizations operate without persistent deficits.

By applying these standards, the Council has been able to maintain an active list of more than 300 reviewed charities. Each review is valid for three years, after which the charity must be reviewed again.

Accountability Wizard

The online Accountability Wizard, launched in 2005, opened up the charity review process to all nonprofits operating in Minnesota. The streamlined system allows us to shift the focus of our charity review role from judge to educator and helper. The Wizard is a self-assessment tool that measures an organization's performance in four critical areas: Public Disclosure, Governance, Financial Activity and Fundraising.

Our Roots

The Minnesota Community Research Council, what is now the Charities Review Council, was established in 1946 using a \$60,000 grant from the Minnesota War Service Fund. The Council was established because of concern that generous Minnesotans, who had contributed large sums to support soldiers during World War II, could be exploited by national fundraising organizations.

Early Years

In 1961, Minnesota established charity registration laws, but they were not widely followed. By 1967, there were 360 charities registered with the state and the attorney general set up a task force to enforce its registration laws. The executive director of the Council at that time, Harold Adams, served on the advisory committee to improve charity law enforcement. During this period, the Council continued to screen budgets of all charities in the state, approving or disapproving them based on their fundraising percentages.

Consumer Advocate Role

The Council represents the interests of you – the informed donor. Over the years, the Council addressed and brought many issues to the public's attention including unethical fundraising practices, inappropriate use of funds, high-pressured telemarketing, inadequate public disclosure, and insufficient governance.

Smart Givers Network Web Site (www.SmartGivers.org)

The Smart Givers Web site makes nonprofit information easily accessible to donors. Through the online searchable Giving Guide, users can search for organizations by name or category. Users can also research reviewed organizations' mission and programs at the online searchable Giving Guide, so they can be sure of what their money supports.

The Web site also features an online searchable auto and goods donation page. Users can search a database of charities that accept donations of non-cash items such as clothing, appliances and automobiles. Users can also narrow searches by pick-up or drop-off availability and geographic location. Charities listed have voluntarily participated in a review.

Users can also register for their personal Smart Giver account. This free service will help users keep up with what matters most, bringing the wealth of information at our Web site to a personal level. In addition, registered users can also invite organizations that interest them to participate in a Council charity review.

Today

The Accountability Wizard has allowed the Council to increase its capacity to review more charities. More than 300 charities have completed the Accountability Wizard or are in process. Charities continue to believe it's important to meet the Council's standards.