

THE PHYSICIAN PHILANTHROPIST'S GUIDE TO CHARITY EVALUATION WEBSITES

- Givewell.org
- Charity Navigator
- Guidestar
- Charity Watch
- Giving Compass
- Give.org
- Great Nonprofits

GIVEWELL.ORG

Givewell.org is aligned with the Effective Altruism movement, which identifies the most cost-effective organizations addressing health and other problems among vulnerable populations. Aside from their data and evidence-based rigor, I also particularly appreciate their cultural awareness and sensitivity, their straightforward recommendations about the ability to absorb more funding, and transparency with their mistakes.

They make specific recommendations for a very small number of organizations, currently for a total of 9 “Top Charities,” that give you the most impact per donated dollar. These are organizations that work in global health and development, as a dollar can go much further overseas.

HELPFUL FOR:	BE AWARE:
Rigorous data and evidence-based vetting criteria.	Limited scope, few options.
Prioritizes impact of donations.	Focuses only on international aid and global health (if these are your giving priorities, wouldn't be considered a con).
Committed to accountability.	
Dollars go further.	

CHARITY NAVIGATOR

This is one of the most well known and commonly used charity evaluation websites. It does have useful information, but their rating system can be misleading if you don't know what information it's giving you.

Charity Navigator's ratings focus on financial health, accountability, and transparency and are based primarily on information provided on an organization's Form 990 (this is the form a nonprofit has to file with the IRS) and website. Organizations are not evaluated by this website on their impact or effectiveness.

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CHARITY NAVIGATOR (CONT'D)

Important points to know about Charity Navigator:

- Provides data on more than 1.6 million nonprofits in the US.
- ONLY rates organizations registered as 501(c)(3)
- It rates more than 160,000 U.S.-based nonprofits. The ones it rates are big—those that have revenues over \$1 million for 2 consecutive years and have been in existence for at least seven years.

HELPFUL FOR:	BE AWARE:
Catching major red flags and confirming an organization as a 501(c)(3).	Places an emphasis on financials, but does not measure for impact.
Discovering organizations by category and learning about their mission.	Organizations might manage money well but still be ineffective.
Comprehensive database.	Rating system can be misleading, implying an organization is ineffective.
Finding nonprofits responding to current events and crises with their "hot topics."	

GUIDESTAR

Guidestar is an even more comprehensive of a database, aggregating information about the 2+ million nonprofits registered as 501(c)(3) organizations in the United States. In addition to publishing their Form 990 tax returns, it categorizes organizations into levels from bronze to platinum on the basis of the amount of information they self-report.

Self-reported information on this site digs deeper and can give you a better understanding of the organizations mission and goals, as well as their strategies, metrics, capabilities and impact. This platform is geared toward people within the philanthropy sector and is often the go-to platform for foundations to check nonprofits. So for anyone with a nonprofit or considering starting one, it's an important database to be on.

When trying to make an impact in a complex system, evaluating and rating is also complex. There are many ways to approach and learn about charitable organizations.

GUIDESTAR (CONT'D)

HELPFUL FOR:	BE AWARE:
Most expansive database of nonprofits in the U.S.	Geared toward people already working within the philanthropy sector.
Verification of IRS registration as 501(c)(3).	Users need to register for account to access some information.
Deeper understanding of organization's self-reported mission, goals, strategies and impact	Organizations not vetted for impact or effectiveness.
Used by commercial businesses and foundations when they want to verify information on a nonprofit.	

CHARITY WATCH

CharityWatch is a nonprofit charity watchdog and information service. Founded by the American Institute of Philanthropy (AIP), it provides detailed information about how efficiently a charity will use donations, while exposing nonprofit abuses as well.

CharityWatch assigns letter grade ratings and provides other statistics on the financial performance of more than 600 American charities. They generally focus on evaluating large charities that receive \$1 million or more of public support annually, are of interest to donors nationally, and have been in existence for at least three years.

HELPFUL FOR:	BE AWARE:
Perform due diligence on organizations financial performance.	Organizations not vetted for impact or effectiveness.
Verification of IRS registration as 501(c)(3).	Using finances only as indicator can be misleading.
Doesn't rely on self-reporting.	Small total number of charities evaluated.
Expose and educate about fraudulent organizations.	Focus on larger organizations.

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GIVING COMPASS

Giving Compass focuses on actually vetting organizations by their practices and impacts. It is set up to be one-stop shop to help people learn about issues, get involved, and give to community-led change.

It is set up to guide donor toward practices that advance equity and address the root causes of society's issues. It practices what is called "Impact-Driven Philanthropy"

HELPFUL FOR:	BE AWARE:
Vets organizations by practices and impact.	Specific focus and aims.
Guides donors toward practices that advance equity and address the root causes of society's issues.	Evaluates 10,000 nonprofits.
Evaluates disaster funds.	Evaluates 600 Issue funds.

GIVE.ORG

The Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance produces reports about national charities and evaluates them against comprehensive standards for charity accountability. Give.org reports on around 1300 nationally soliciting charities.

Evaluates accountability of charitable organizations according to 20 standards including: Governance and oversight, Measuring effectiveness, Finances, Solicitations and informational materials.

HELPFUL FOR:	BE AWARE:
Evaluates accountability of charitable for multiple standards, not just financials.	Does not measure impact.
Self reported information includes governance and measuring effectiveness.	Relies on self-reported information.
Easy to use with additional helpful information.	Reports on about 1300 charities.

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GREAT NONPROFITS

This platform is essentially a YELP site for nonprofits. In their words:

“Great Nonprofits is the leading platform for community-sourced stories about non-profits. These stories are submitted by people who know you best -- your clients, donors, volunteers, and others—all those who have experienced the impact of nonprofit work up close!”

The people directly involved with a nonprofit – those volunteering or benefitting from their services – can be in a position to give great insights into the workings and effectiveness of an organization. Their stories can be helpful.

HELPFUL FOR:	BE AWARE:
Good for discovering organizations by cause category and learning about their mission.	Subjective experiences and anecdotal stories.
Stories and evaluations by volunteers or recipients of aid can provide unique insight into an organization.	Relies on self reported or third party information.
Easy to use with additional helpful information, blogs and ways to donate.	Does not do their own vetting or evaluation of impact.

LEARN MORE

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