

When considering how to give during times of crisis and turmoil—whether natural, social, or political—it’s important to think about how your charitable resources can align with your values and address the issues you care about most. Giving can focus on supporting new ideas, expanding successful programs, or filling gaps for the most vulnerable among us. In challenging times, philanthropy can have a significant impact on both the people in need and the nonprofits that serve them.

What Can I Do?

We are often asked, “*What can I do?*” The good news is that there are meaningful ways to help. While there is no one-size-fits-all model of giving, the considerations below can help guide your decisions about how and where to give.

Focus on What Matters Most

When the headlines feel overwhelming, pause to make sure you are connecting with people and news sources that you know and trust. You can also go directly to nonprofits themselves by reading their blogs or newsletters, or by reaching out to contacts at an organization—while keeping in mind that their availability may be limited during the peak of a crisis.

Then, think about what matters most to you and your family. What change would you most like to see in your community and the world? Is there a specific population, geography, or issue that holds personal meaning to you?

Give Strategically

As new crises emerge, you may consider changing your giving strategy. However, it’s likely that the organizations you already support are facing hardships too, regardless of their mission. They’ll be counting on your continued support.

A good guidepost for giving during uncertain times is to give unrestricted support. This allows an organization to use funds flexibly to meet their evolving needs. Most nonprofits will allow you to designate your gift “where it’s needed most.” If you choose to restrict your donation to a particular emergency, it is wise to double check that the organization will accept such a restriction.

While many individuals and families give at the end of the calendar year—for tax reasons or when families are together for the holidays—you might also consider giving earlier in the year. This enables organizations to put your gift to work sooner and avoid budget challenges as the year draws to a close. You might also consider making an extra “safety net” gift at the height of a challenge, followed by your “regular” annual gift later. Many charities are already experiencing the impacts of federal funding losses, increased demand for services, and rising costs. A gift now can boost morale and help organizations maintain their programs and services without interruptions.

Finally, consider committing to long-term support for organizations you care about most. A multi-year commitment allows an organization to invest in and plan for the future, knowing their donors will be there to support them longer term. Planned gifts are another good strategy for offering long-term support to an organization.

Consider Doing Something More – Responding to the Unexpected

When a crisis arises outside of your usual giving focus area, first aim to better understand the issue. In cases of disasters in other parts of the country or world, read that community’s local news to get a sense of the needs and context. In the U.S., typically a community foundation or local United Way will lead a disaster response coalition that shares information with the public and manages donations.

Following the work of larger, issue-specific groups can also point you toward more resources, such as informational webinars, articles, and learning opportunities, and help you gain a sense of the larger context surrounding a cause that’s new to you. For example, there are national environmental groups that publish recommendations for municipalities looking to build climate resilience; industry associations supporting sectors such as public health or academia; and global human rights organizations that collect data and report on humanitarian issues worldwide.

When responding to a disaster, keep long-term recovery and prevention in mind. Many communities and nonprofits conduct ongoing disaster preparedness and resiliency work that could benefit from philanthropic support, with projects ranging from facilities improvements, to security upgrades, to staff training.

Lastly, you might also consider doing an “audit” of the many resources you can offer beyond financial giving, whether that’s a gift of time as a volunteer, expertise as a Board Member or advisor, subject matter expertise, or support with fundraising, to name a few.

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