

# GIVING

## How To Know A Responsible Nonprofit

BY PAUL FLYNN, PRESIDENT & CEO  
Southwest Florida Community Foundation

How can you be sure a nonprofit organization is stable and well run?

How can you assure that your donation will be spent well and not go into a "black hole?"

There are questions you should always ask before writing a check to your favorite charities.

How can you assure that your donation will be spent well and not go into a "black hole?"

The Southwest Florida Community Foundation has given away more than \$24 million in its 30 years existence.

We continually monitor agencies for good governance, wise spending, and appropriate programs.

Not all non-profits earn a grant. Here are some things you should see before you write the check:

- Is the nonprofit recognized as a 501 (c)(3) charity by the Internal Revenue Service? Don't be afraid to ask the agency for a copy of its IRS approval letter. We require a copy with any nonprofit applying for a grant from us.

- Who's on the governing board? A healthy nonprofit board should include at least one financial professional, such as a Certified Public Accountant. That way, a wise finance board member can monitor the spending and keep the nonprofit within its operating budget.

A good nonprofit will have board members who aren't directly involved with operations. A board of a youth organi-

zation, for example, shouldn't have only parents on the board.

It's wise to have an attorney on a nonprofit board, to help the charity avoid legal problems. Ask for the affiliation of board members. Are they family members of the boss?

- Ask to see the operating budget. Be careful that you don't restrict your nonprofit, though. The United Way, for example, needs to spend money annually on fund-raising, because United Ways must raise what they give away every year.

- What are the 'perks' for the top administrators? An outstanding administrator should be paid a salary comparable to others who do the same job elsewhere. But there needs to be a logical reason for providing a country club membership. But don't expect a good administrator to work without benefits, such as health care and retirement savings.

- Visit the organization's offices or facilities.

When you visit a homeless shelter, you'll know quickly if it serves the most needy, every day.

- Study the track record of the agency's programs. How many clients did the agency serve last year? Did the agency fulfill its mission statement?

- Does the agency duplicate what others do in the community?

In 2006, three similar agencies merged their administrative functions in Fort Myers. They have one office, one phone system, one copying machine, and one executive director, but the new agency is serving more people more economically.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions. You're giving away your money. You want it spent wisely. ■

*The Southwest Florida Community Foundation has been supporting the communities of Lee, Charlotte, Collier, Glades and Hendry Counties through endowed funds for 30 years. With assets of more than \$54 million and 310 endowed funds, the Community Foundation has provided more than \$24.5 million in grants and scholarships to the communities it serves.*

## PUZZLE ANSWERS

4	5	3	8	9	1	6	2	7
8	1	7	4	2	6	5	9	3
6	9	2	5	3	7	1	8	4
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2	7	8	3	6	9	4	5	1
5	3	9	1	8	4	7	6	2
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PER LAMAR RITE VELL  
FTF SAL CANFA DOPPEY  
CRAATCHY SHRIMP WAVE  
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RAPT HAPD TRAVAILS  
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