



*The United States Secret Service is providing this advisory regarding the risks associated with charity scams and the schemes that scammers may use to exploit tragic events for financial gain.*

## What is a Charity Scam?

Charity scams involve deceiving people into donating to fake or misrepresented charitable causes. A scammer's goal is to exploit the generosity of donors for fraudulent purposes. Scammers often exploit the urgency and vulnerability of affected individuals and communities. These fraudulent activities can take various forms, including fake fundraisers and phishing scams.

## Fake Charities

Scammers often create fake charities with names and websites that closely resemble a recognized charity. These fake websites often feature poor spelling and grammar, basic website design, and minimal contact information that could be false.

## Fraudulent Fundraisers & Crowdfunding

Some fundraising and crowdfunding sites do very little vetting of individuals who decide to solicit for assistance. Therefore, it is often difficult for donors to verify the trustworthiness of requests for financial support. Scammers may use publicly available photos of victims to make fraudulent fundraisers appear more personal.

## Impact on Victims

These scams reduce the financial resources available to legitimate victims. Misinformation spreads quickly after tragic events. Public trust in relief organizations can erode, which may discourage future donations.

## Phishing Scams

Scammers can create phishing websites or messages to steal donor credit card information during attempted donations to what a donor thinks are charitable causes. These fraudulent websites or messages are designed to steal the donor's money and identity.

## Tips for Avoiding Charity Scams

- **Prevention:** Communities can protect vulnerable individuals and ensure that aid reaches those who truly need it by understanding this type of fraud and implementing preventive measures.
- **Remain Alert:** Be alert for overly emotional charitable appeals that say little about what the charity intends to do with your donation. A photo alone does not confirm a connection to an alleged victim or their family.
- **Slow Down:** Do not give in to the sense of urgency and the excessive pressure to donate. Do your own research before you make a donation to ensure it is not a scam.
- **Understand Crowdfunding:** Only use reputable crowdfunding websites to donate to individuals that you know personally. Do not assume that your donation will get to the intended recipient.
- **Use Caution:** Ensure that an organization is legitimate before donating. Verify an organization's authenticity through platforms like the Better Business Bureau's Scam Tracker, Charity Navigator, Charity Watch, or the IRS Tax Exempt Organization search tool.
- **Verify Unsolicited Communication:** Always verify the source of information. Use trusted sources of information like law enforcement and government agencies, or established news organizations.
- **Verify the Source:** Be cautious of unsolicited messages or calls claiming to be from charities. Verify a solicitation through other means before donating.



## What to Do If You Are a Victim

Report charity fraud schemes to your local law enforcement agency, the Federal Trade Commission at <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov>, and/or the Internet Crime Complaint Center at <https://www.ic3.gov>. The United States Secret Service works closely with local and federal law enforcement agencies to investigate these crimes.