



Inspector General Insights

(Clerk's December 2022 Newsletter)

Background: According to donorbox.org, December is often the busiest time of year for donations. Around [31% of donations](#) are made in December alone, and 12% come in the final three days of the year. In fact, 28% of nonprofit organizations raise from 26 to 50% of their annual funds through their end-of-year campaigns. Collier County Clerk Crystal Kinzel is urging residents to be prudent in evaluating charities when considering their year-end charitable donations.

Objective: To inform residents of due diligence in vetting charitable donations, and to advise citizens of a local ordinance related to such organizations.

Recommendations & Actions: The Clerk's Office of Inspector General (OIG) advises the following steps prior to donating to a charity:

- Verify a charity's tax-exempt status at the IRS [Tax Exempt Organization Search](#) before donating goods, services or money. You can review their Forms 990, to determine if their annual filings are current, and review changes from year to year. These forms detail the salaries of the top executives, the amounts paid to their largest contractors, the specifics of their revenues and spending, and the amount of funds raised that are being held in reserve for future programs.
- Donate to trusted, well-known charities. Beware of scammers who create fake charities during natural disasters. Always verify a charity's legitimacy through its official website. Contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at [fdacs.gov Charities](#) or 1(800) HELP-FLA to check the legitimacy of a charity, or to see if there are any complaints recorded.
- Ask the fundraiser for the charity's exact name, web address and mailing address, so it can be confirmed later. Some dishonest telemarketers use names that sound like large well-known charities to confuse people. Individuals should never let any caller pressure them, as a legitimate charity will be happy to get a donation at any time.
- Confirm all phone numbers for charities. If you need to contact a charity by phone, check the charity's official website to see if the number you have is legitimate. If you're using text-to-donate, check with the charity to ensure the number is valid before donating.
- Ignore suspicious emails requesting donations or other assistance, do not click on any links or open any attachments. Scammers regularly use email for phishing attacks and to spread malware.
- Verify information in social media posts before you give. Crowd-funding websites often host individual requests for help, but they are not always vetted by the site or other sources.
- Beware of fake charities, which are part of the [IRS's Dirty Dozen tax scams for 2022](#). The IRS recently announced their efforts to fight fraud during [Charity Fraud Awareness Week](#), October 17-21, 2022. They recommend you take these precautions when remitting payment to a charity:
 - Donors should not work with charities that ask them to pay by giving numbers from a gift card or by wiring money, as this is typically how scammers ask people to pay.

- If you're donating online, make sure the webpage where you enter your payment information has "https" in the web address. That means your information is encrypted and transmitted securely. Encryption alone doesn't mean the site is legit, however - scammers know how to encrypt, too.
- It's safest to pay by credit card or check, and only after having done research on the charity.

Conclusion: [Collier County Ordinance 2012-01](#) provides for additional safeguards when there are public solicitations of contributions within the County, including applications and forms to be filed with the Clerk's office. Due to the number of complaints filed with the OIG regarding not-for-profit entities, and resulting prosecutions, these documents will be reviewed by the OIG's Public Integrity Unit. Those charities seeking government funding, or those conducting business with the County, will be reviewed with priority.

Clerk Kinzel's Office of Inspector General is dedicated to preventing, detecting, and reporting on fraudulent activities related to Collier governmental operations or programs, and fraudulent filings made through the Clerk's office.

Total # Transactions	Amounts Audited or Reviewed	Questioned Costs	Taxpayer Savings	# Recommendations
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10