

WISE GIVING™

GUIDE

BBB WISE GIVING ALLIANCE : SUMMER/FALL 2015



Refusing to Play Ball: When Charities Don't Disclose





A Publication of the
BBB Wise Giving Alliance

The *Wise Giving Guide* is published three times a year to help donors make more informed giving decisions. This guide includes a compilation of the latest evaluation conclusions completed by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance.

If you would like to see a particular topic discussed in this guide, please email suggestions to give@council.bbb.org or write to us at the address below.

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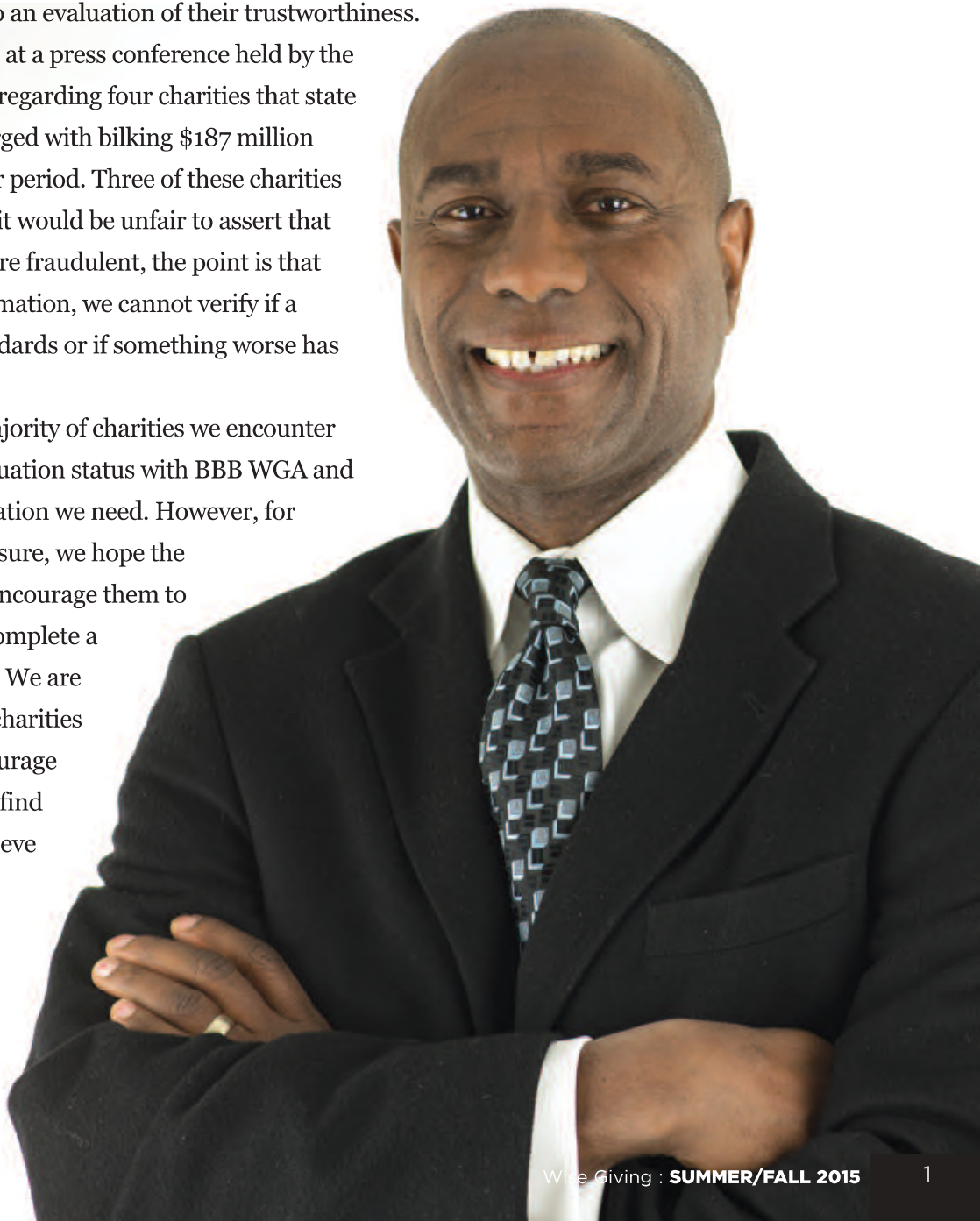
A charity's unwillingness to provide the information we need to compete a rigorous evaluation against our holistic standards speaks volumes about its desire to help donors make informed giving decisions. When a charity does not provide information to us despite repeated written requests, we classify them as nondisclosure. Not surprisingly, many donors tell me that nondisclosure is a red flag and they will not support these charities. They are troubled that these charities feel they can solicit without being open to an evaluation of their trustworthiness.

Recently I gave remarks at a press conference held by the Federal Trade Commission regarding four charities that state regulators and the FTC charged with bilking \$187 million from donors over a five-year period. Three of these charities were nondisclosure. While it would be unfair to assert that all nondisclosure charities are fraudulent, the point is that without the requested information, we cannot verify if a charity meets all of our standards or if something worse has taken place.

Fortunately, the vast majority of charities we encounter want you to know their evaluation status with BBB WGA and provide the detailed information we need. However, for those that choose nondisclosure, we hope the public will take notice and encourage them to share the facts we need to complete a trustworthiness evaluation. We are here to help nondisclosure charities at no cost to them. We encourage them to reach out to us and find out about how they can achieve accreditation.



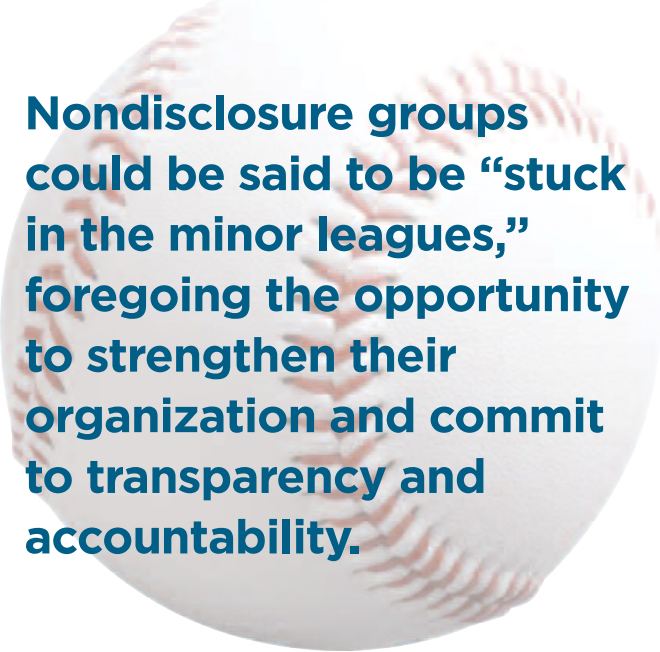
H. Art Taylor, *President*



Refusing to Play Ball: When Charities Don't Disclose

By Edward Loftin

George Herman “Babe” Ruth, one of the best, most iconic baseball players of all time, struck out 1,330 times. I doubt this is a figure that resonates with anyone. But the number 714, his career home run total, is the figure everyone remembers, The number of “dingers” hit by the “Sultan of Swat” has been etched in the American psyche since he last took the plate for the, wait for it: Boston Braves.¹ Hank Aaron eventually surpassed Ruth’s home run record in the 1970s and ended his career with 755 (against 1,383 strikeouts). In the Harry Potter series, you have Lord Voldemort. The “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named” of baseball, Barry Bonds, surpassed Aaron and Ruth with 762 home runs, but perjury and obstruction of justice indictments, and the assumption of steroid use, means many hope Bonds’ record will include a special character: an asterisk.



Nondisclosure groups could be said to be “stuck in the minor leagues,” foregoing the opportunity to strengthen their organization and commit to transparency and accountability.

So, how does this relate to charity evaluation and organizations that don’t provide any of the requested information to the BBB Wise Giving Alliance (BBB WGA)? If you only took Babe Ruth’s strikeout figure, you might think he was one of the worst players in history, but this only tells part of the story. If the Great Bambino never “stepped to the plate,” he would not have the opportunity to strike out or hit a home run, much as a charitable organization that does not participate in our charity evaluation program does not have the opportunity to meet our 20 *BBB Standards for Charity Accountability*. Nondisclosure groups could be said to be “stuck in the minor leagues,” foregoing the opportunity to strengthen their organization and commit to transparency and accountability. And even if a group doesn’t meet all BBB Standards upon initial review, the BBB WGA is always willing to work with those that do “play ball” to amend and verify findings about standards as the charity makes necessary changes.

Statistics don’t always tell the whole story. Another Yankee great, Mr. October, Reggie Jackson, struck out more times than any player in the history of baseball (2,597) but is mostly remembered for his clutch performances, including belting three home runs in the decisive 6th game of the 1977 World Series. But in this age of instant access to information on charities and increased scrutiny of the sector, the BBB WGA believes our role is to act as an umpire, helping both charities and donors through thoughtful, experienced analysis and verification. Through our evaluation process, we hope to give charities the opportunity to tell their whole accountability story.

Buyer beware, seller beware

Caveat emptor. If your Latin skills are not up to snuff, the phrase means “buyer beware” a term based on the idea that buyers have more information than sellers. In the charity world, of course we are talking about donors rather than buyers. These donors want the satisfaction that comes with giving to an organization they can trust to put their money to good use. A donation to a nondisclosure charity presents a problem

¹ Babe Ruth first played for the Boston Red Sox (1914-1919), then the New York Yankees (1920-1934). He retired on June 1, 1935, after playing a portion of the season with the Boston Braves.

for the donor because it makes it much harder to verify the organization's accountability and transparency without the charity's participation. In this case, the charity or "seller" has more information than the donor, or "buyer." Donors should be cautious to give to charities on an uneven playing field.

However, *caveat emptor* can be balanced by a related term, *caveat venditor*, or seller beware. How do charities fit into this example? If there is a penalty to the charity for not providing adequate information to donors, the playing field is leveled by allowing donors to hold charities liable for not living up to particular expectations. By participating in the BBB WGA charity review process, charities can show donors their commitment to accountability. Once the field has been leveled, donors can make informed giving decisions, hopefully moving from passive targets of fundraising appeals to valued stakeholders.

Stepping up to the plate

BBB WGA currently reports on over 1,300 nationally soliciting charities. Additionally, 57 of the 113 local BBBs report on over 10,000 local charities. Of the nationally soliciting charities appearing in this *Guide*, 35% are nondisclosure. After a series of three request letters are sent to charities (one of which is sent via certified-mail), if they have still not enrolled in the charity review process and submitted the questionnaire, the BBB WGA moves forward with a nondisclosure report. This report appears on our website (www.give.org) and in the *Wise Giving Guide*. While it's unlikely that we will ever get all groups to participate, 35% is far too many charities unwilling to "play ball" and commit to earning donor trust. Our mission to help donors make informed giving decisions, as well to advance high standards of conduct among charities, requires participation. Let's play ball!

Excuses, excuses, excuses

Needless to say, most of the charities on which we publish nondisclosure reports would rather we publish nothing at all, and BBB WGA analysts have heard a host of reasons for not participating from these groups: excuses, criticisms about our reporting process, and everything in-between. The more common rebuttals to our requests for information from charities include:

- "We just don't have the time or resources to participate."
- "We are already overburdened with filings for foundations, states and the IRS."
- "Our organization is unique and not a good candidate for review."



- “Our mission is too important to worry about providing information to the BBB.”
- “Our donors already know we are doing a good job.”
- “We don’t agree with the *BBB Standards for Charity Accountability*.”

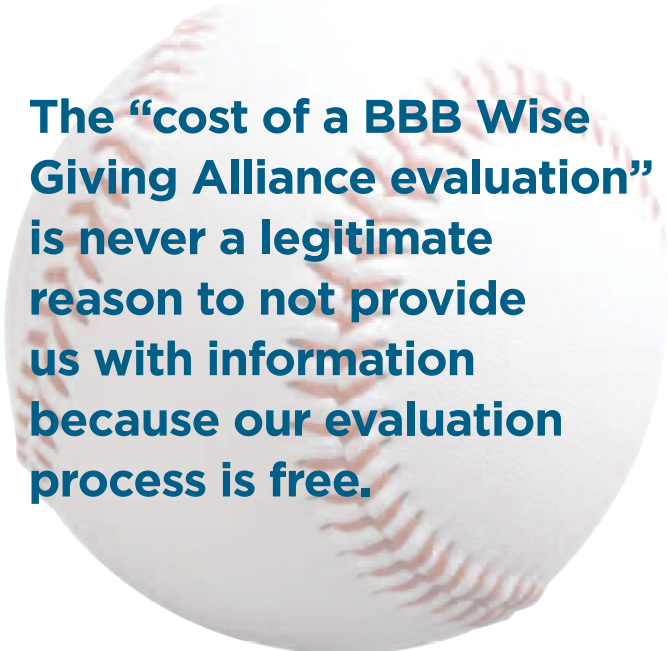
BBB WGA updates a charity’s report every two years in order to reduce the time and resources a charity devotes to this evaluation. Regardless, some charities view the evaluation process as an integral part of ensuring donor trust and in verifying that appropriate oversight and accountability measures are in place. While every organization is different, our experience and the nature of the BBB Standards enable us to work with groups with widely diverse incomes, constituencies, and affiliations. Charities should not assume that their donors know they are doing a good job. Chances are there are donors out there that don’t know, not to mention organizations that do similar work that have gone through the BBB WGA evaluation process. Also, the current *BBB Standards for Charitable Accountability* were developed over several years with significant input from charities, donors, fundraisers, foundations, regulators, accountants and other experts.

One reason for not being evaluated after repeated requests for information, however, is simply not true: That the cost is too high to go through our evaluation process. There is no charge to charities for being reviewed by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance.

Donor perception and reality

While we are not suggesting that charities in the nondisclosure category are flawed groups with “something to hide,” in our experience, donor perception of these groups is not favorable. BBB WGA gets hundreds of phone calls and emails about nondisclosure groups every year and much of the feedback we receive from these communications indicate a host of negative assumptions. “The donations must be going to line the pockets of charity administrators.” “I wonder what they are hiding.” “This is a red flag. I’m not going to give to an organization that hasn’t provided you with any information.” Rarely, if ever, do we hear arguments from donors such as, “Well, they must have a good reason for not providing information to the BBB Wise Giving Alliance and I think I am going to make a donation anyway.” Unfortunately, this negative donor perception may apply to all nondisclosure groups, even if it is a case of “a few bad apples spoiling the bunch.”

Then there is the reality that some nondisclosure organizations are simply bad actors. In May of 2015, the Federal Trade Commission as well as regulators from all 50 states and the District of Columbia filed a complaint against four cancer charities in one of the worst charity



The “cost of a BBB Wise Giving Alliance evaluation” is never a legitimate reason to not provide us with information because our evaluation process is free.

scandals in recent memory, a case in which reality may be worse than donor perception. The organizations are accused of deceiving donors and spending millions of dollars in donations for the personal benefit of the friends and family members of organizational leadership, all four of which were started by James T. Reynolds Sr. or his friends and family, beginning with Cancer Fund of America in 1987. The charities are accused of indiscretions including trips to restaurants, dating website subscriptions, retail purchases, car washes, college tuition, trips to Disney World, jet ski rides and Caribbean cruises, all while indicating that donations were to fund “services like hospice care, transporting patients to and from chemotherapy sessions and buying pain medication for children.” (*New York Times*, May 19, 2015, *4 Cancer Charities Are Accused of Fraud*) Of the four charities in the FTC complaint, three were nondisclosure. (BBB WGA published a report in 2014 on the fourth charity, Breast Cancer Society. The charity did not meet several BBB Standards and we were unable to verify two others.) Are all nondisclosure groups operating in this way? Of course not. But the nature of nondisclosure reporting is such that the reality of the weak links can color donor opinion towards the others.

Reasons to disclose

Organizations can certainly decline or ignore BBB WGA requests for information. We take our objectivity very seriously, and we don't engage in speculation about reasons for nondisclosure. However, if a charity shuts its doors, has a government action against it, or has been the subject of complaints received by BBB WGA, we include this additional information in the report on a nondisclosure group. While IRS Form 990s are publicly available and charities often include annual reports and other documents on their websites, these items don't provide enough information to verify if a charity meets all 20 of the BBB Charity Standards. Much of the accountability information needed to complete BBB accountability assessments is not publically available.

BBB WGA understands that charities already complete many state registrations, as well as provide information to foundations and the IRS each year. This is the necessary cost of doing business in the charity sector. However, much of this information is largely financial. The *BBB Standards for Charity Accountability* go well beyond financial reporting to include governance, truthfulness of fundraising materials, security and privacy and other materials essential to get a more complete picture of the organization's operations. Sometimes foundations themselves recommend or even require charities to go through the BBB evaluation process before consideration for grants, recognizing the value of "going beyond" what is legally required for operation. The recognition from outside organizations and funders is an important reason groups should consider providing information to the BBB WGA.

Some charities believe that making their financial documents and annual reports available on their website is transparency enough. While we agree that this is a good first step, many questions asked by BBB WGA are not typically answered on charity websites. Is the organization's board of directors informed of financial arrangements made with outside fundraising firms? Does the charity's board receive a written report on the charity's effectiveness to determine if it is aligned with its mission? Does the organization engage in cause-related promotions that indicate the amount of the purchase price that will benefit the charity? Not only are these questions not usually answered on charity websites, they are questions the average donor may not even know to ask. The donating public trusts the BBB WGA to dig deeper and get answers to these questions through its evaluation process. Once we receive completed questionnaires from charities, we seek to verify and confirm all the information provided by examining each financial document and annual report

Please see page 9 for an explanation of these and the other symbols used to indicate a charity's status. *Know the symbols!*



**Accredited
(Met Standards)**



**Standards
Not Met**



Did Not Disclose

provided, as well as charity websites, policies, and fundraising appeals. Through disclosure to the BBB WGA, charities can show their commitment to transparency and accountability and separate themselves from those doing just enough to meet legal requirements.


Fear of not meeting all 20 BBB Standards is a concern for many charities. However, if donors ask about an organization that has not provided us with information, there is only one thing we can tell them: that the organization failed to disclose. On the other hand, if organizations do complete the evaluation process and end up not meeting all 20 BBB Standards, we can provide detailed information about which

standards the organization does and does not meet.

In this case, we empower donors to make their own decisions about the charity and BBB Standards that are important to them. Also, the BBB WGA is willing to note future, specific changes the organization plans on making to meet given standards within our reports, yet another reason to participate in the evaluation process. Even if the charity doesn't meet BBB Standards, donors have the opportunity to recognize that the charity is putting its best foot forward.

Value of the evaluation process

A June 2015 BBB WGA interview with Deborah Kloepfel, President and Founder of the Military Spouse Corporate Career Network (MSCCN), sheds some light on the evaluation process from a charity's perspective. Kloepfel's idea for the organization began as the "first tank crossed into Iraq," with the realization that the spouses of military men and women often get overlooked in times of war. She wanted to help these people find work so they could help support their families, from writing resumes to job placement and steps in between.



A 2013 study... found positive implications for organizations that go through the BBB charity evaluation process and meet all 20 Standards.

MSCCN has been evaluated twice by the BBB WGA, first in 2012 and again 2014. Each time, the organization initially did not meet several of the *BBB Standards for Charity Accountability*. On each occasion, by working with the BBB WGA, MSCCN was able to amend the initial findings and eventually meet all 20 BBB Standards. During the 2012 review, the organization did

not meet Standard 3, which deals with board meeting frequency and attendance. MSCCN eventually met Standard 3, and Kloepfel states that, "Now that our board is meeting more often, we are getting more done." She adds that, "Because we meet more frequently, more money is coming in and the board members are more engaged." During the second evaluation, Kloepfel took the advice of a BBB WGA analyst and set up an audit committee, a risk management committee and a finance committee. Kloepfel credits the BBB WGA with helping her understand financial stewardship and improve the privacy and security elements of the organization's website (Standard 18). An important takeaway here is that, by going through the evaluation process, the organization was able to improve its operations, which benefits both the charity and donors. Meeting BBB Standards is great, but helping charities improve their work is more than a means to an end.

Kristin Conner, the Executive Director of CURE Childhood Cancer (CCC) speaks of the BBB WGA evaluation process as an "education," enabling the organization to "reveal weaknesses and affirm that we are doing well in their areas." Conner, whose charity focuses on new treatments for cancers affecting children and supports patients and their families, particularly appreciated "the guidance and time to make corrections and become fully compliant," saying other watchdog groups do not allow for such flexibility. Like MSCCN, this is another group which did not initially meet BBB Standards. CCC was able to amend findings to become an accredited charity, which Conner says is a "significant assurance to our donors from an objective, uninterested third party....that our practices and processes are vetted and legit and that we are acting as good stewards of our resources." While the evaluation process does take some time, Conner states that, "In the end it will make your organization stronger as you make corrections and come into compliance."

Show me the money

The bottom line for many charities is they want and need donations to operate and continue their missions. A 2013 study by Professor Greg Chen of the Baruch College School of Public Affairs at the City of University of New York found positive implications for organizations that go through the BBB charity evaluation process and meet all 20 Standards.² And, yes, it involves increases in revenues for charitable organizations. The study, funded by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance and the Education and Research Foundation of BBB of Metropolitan New York, concluded that "meeting *BBB Standards for Charity*

²To access the full study completed by Professor Greg Chen, visit: <http://www.bbb.org/us/Storage/113/Documents/chen-paper.pdf>

Accountability is positively associated with increased levels of public support as measured by fundraising revenue.” Specifically, there was an 8% increase in revenue for the national charity sample, or groups evaluated by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance.

The Baruch study reinforces MSCCN’s Deborah Kloeppel’s description of the BBB WGA’s process as being a “stepping stone to great dollars” and one that helped set her organization up for “expansion and growth.”

A new era of accountability and transparency: a more complete picture

The inseparable terms transparency and accountability are commonplace in the charitable sector, but what do they really mean? Transparency conjures images of clarity, or ability to see through an object. But just as windows require occasional cleaning to get a better view, transparency in the charitable sector requires organizations to disclose information to maintain donor trust. Thoughtful analysis of the entire organization is required to get a deeper understanding of the many aspects of a charity’s operations.

Furthermore, the notion of transparency has evolved in recent years as donors have come to expect instant access to information, not just accessibility. IRS Form 990s are publically available with the click of a mouse, and charity websites have virtually unlimited space to provide information. That being said, more is not always better. The BBB WGA helps donors, once thrilled to simply have access to information on charities, become discerning contributors based on our evaluative reports.

Similarly, the notion of accountability should help ensure that charitable organizations are held responsible for all areas of their operations. True accountability is more than just financial reporting, and should include governance, effectiveness, fundraising and privacy. Charities should be prepared to answer for all of its decisions, or they may be only “counting beans.” The BBB Wise Giving Alliance stands for a holistic approach to transparency and accountability.

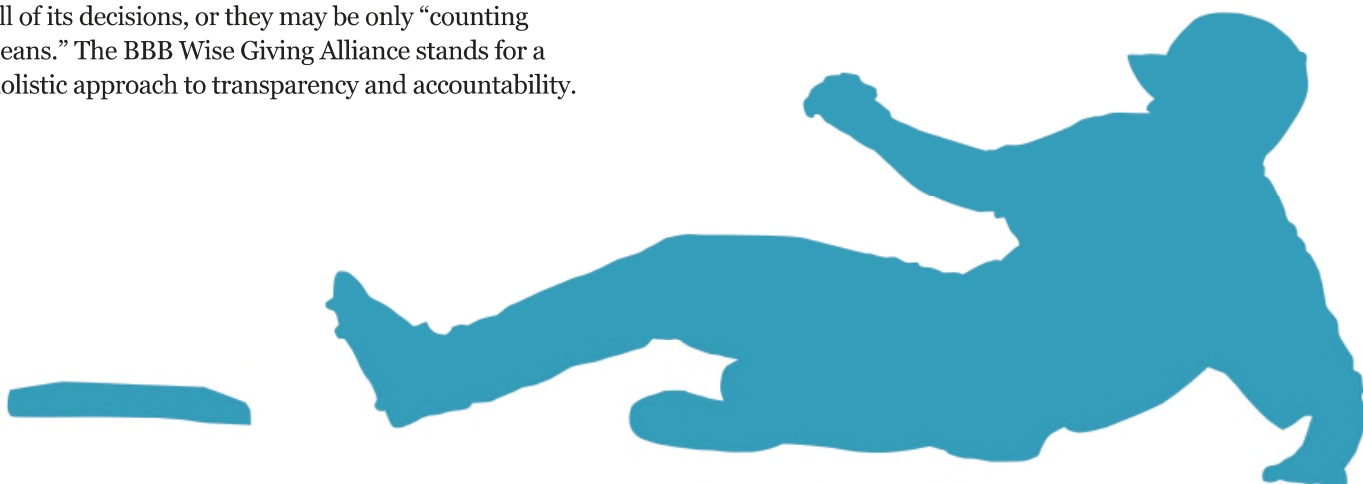
A step in the right direction

We have explained the negative stigma attached to nondisclosure reports and the excuses charities make for not participating, as well as the value of both the evaluation process and of meeting all 20 BBB Standards. And with charity transparency and accountability more in the spotlight than ever, the depth of analysis and the verification required to meet the *BBB Standards for Charity Accountability* sets the bar higher than an analysis based solely on the content of the IRS Form 990. Our higher degree of scrutiny gives charitable organizations an opportunity to separate themselves from the pack and stand out from other nationally soliciting charities while giving donors someone to trust.

BBB WGA is embarking on a new campaign to reach nondisclosure groups. This campaign will involve outreach to nationally-soliciting charities that have previously not submitted information to the BBB WGA, and will reflect the trust the public places in groups that meet our 20 BBB Standards. We will be increasing our communications with these nondisclosure groups to encourage their participation, highlighting the value of increased transparency and accountability, and the potential to make their organizations better. This campaign will seek to “shed light” on both groups that do and do not disclose information to the BBB WGA, promoting participation in our evaluation process while continuing to recognize those charities committed to trustworthiness in the sector.

According to Deborah Kloeppel of MSCCN, becoming an accredited charity “Did something to the soul of our organization.... It made us credible.” We want all charities to have the same opportunity, and the first step to accreditation is submitting the BBB charity questionnaire.

For donors, trust begins with playing by the rules. ■



How to Read the List of National Charities

The following is an alphabetical listing of the charities that are the subjects of BBB Wise Giving Alliance evaluations. The list includes organizations that have requested to be evaluated as well as those that have received the highest volume of inquiries. The BBB WGA receives inquiries through the mail, phone, e-mail and referrals from local Better Business Bureaus.

Please note the following explanations about this list:

Name Inclusion: Inclusion on this list should not be interpreted as approval or disapproval of a charity. The information in this listing is intended solely to assist donors in exercising their own judgment.

Name Omission: Omission from this list should not be interpreted as meaning that a charity meets or does not meet standards. In general, it simply means that the BBB WGA has not developed a report because it has not received recent inquiries about a charity or a charity has not requested to be evaluated.

Latest Results: This list reflects the latest charity report results as of July 6, 2015. Charity reports are available until their expiration dates, generally two years after their completion. All reports are based on the BBB Wise Giving Alliance *Standards for Charity Accountability*.



Are you looking for a national charity that's not on our list? Ask us about specific national charities not currently included. Encourage national charities we don't currently report about to contact us about enrolling online (there's never a charge for evaluation). In either way, you can help expand the list.



Note to readers about "see entry for"



Charities sometimes use several names in their materials. In some cases the variation is only slight, such as using an acronym for the full name. In other cases, the names have no self-evident connection, as, for example, the official corporate name and a name used in fund raising. In still others, different individual names may denote different programs of the same organization. This list includes all names currently used by a charity, but the evaluation status of that charity appears only under the main entry. White horizontal bars indicate an alternate name, and refer you to the evaluation listing.







Definitions for the List's Column Headings

 **Accredited (Met Standards)** — Charities with a green check box  in the first column next to their name met the 20 Standards for Charity Accountability on pages 52–53. There is no charge to charities for the accreditation evaluation.

 **Standards Not Met** — If a charity has number codes (for example: 3, 6, 7) in the second column with a yellow X mark  that means the charity did not meet cited provision(s) of the BBB Charity Standards on pages 52–53.

 **Unable to Verify** — If a charity has number codes (for example: 8, 9, 13) in the column with a blue question mark  that means the BBB WGA was unable to verify if the charity met the cited provision(s) of the BBB Charity Standards on pages 52–53. This designation indicates that the charity either did not provide all of the requested information or the information provided was not sufficient to conclude that they met the cited standard(s).

 **Did Not Disclose** — If a charity has a red exclamation mark  the charitable organization either has not responded to written BBB WGA requests for information or has declined to be evaluated in relation to the *BBB Standards for Charity Accountability*. Charity participation in the BBB WGA's review is voluntary. However, without the requested information, it is not possible to determine whether these charities adhere to all of the *BBB Standards for Charity Accountability*. The BBB WGA encourages charities to disclose accountability information beyond that typically included in financial statements and government filings, in order to demonstrate transparency and strengthen public trust in the charitable sector. The majority of national charities contacted by BBB WGA provide information and participate in the BBB WGA's evaluation program.

 **Review in Progress** — Charities with a  in the column marked Review in Progress are being routinely evaluated based on current materials provided by the organization to the BBB WGA.