

2016 Rochester Giving

For those who are daunted by giving choices



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

Dana Vosburgh, with Manning & Napier, believes many who are interested in giving to charities are unsure about the process and might forgo donating. "That's a shame," he says, "because there are a lot of charities that could benefit from the money."

A wealth of assistance available from attorneys and financial planners

By **RICHARD ZITRIN**

Dana Vosburgh frequently meets people with sizable estates who are interested in donating to charities—but have no idea where to begin.

"I think unfortunately because of that, they might forgo making donations, and that's a shame because there are a lot of charities that could benefit from the mon-

ey," says Manning & Napier's director of family wealth management.

The philanthropic process need not be daunting: Education and information are readily available from both the non-profits themselves and a wealth of attorneys and financial planners around town.

The first step is to identify the issues, causes and organizations that are important to you. Is it the arts? Animals? Health care? Children? Spend some time zeroing in on your greatest interests.

"The philanthropic urge is deep and basic to our humanity," says Daniel Meyers, president of the Al Sigl Community of Agencies.

Next, find an organization with whom you have a good rapport, Meyers says. He and others at the center are open to questions from potential donors about how the operation runs. Donors need to know that an organization is well-managed and up-front.

"I think many donors want to kick the tires of the leadership, both professional and volunteer, because they want to make sure that people are going to take care of their money the same way they have taken care of their money and built it up," he says.

Next, dig deep. Look up the non-profit's IRS Form 990 at www.guidestar.org.

The form spells out the organization's mission, programs and finances for the most recent fiscal year.

Meyers says millennials and Generation Xers are more skeptical and more likely than baby boomers to research charities online. At the same time, younger adults seem to be continuing their elders' philanthropic ways with their own twist: They want to give directly and personally to a charity that meets their standards.

"I'm very encouraged," Meyers says. "I think the younger generations are very principled and very generous. I think that bodes well for us."

The next step is to set up a plan for giving that is tailored to your goals and to stick to it, Vosburgh says.

"It's a good idea to understand (your) goals and set up a schedule for accomplishing that, whether it's small donations each year or one sizable amount that could seed the process and go from there," he says.

There are several ways to do this. Including charitable gifts in a will is a straightforward process for an attorney, as is setting up a charitable trust, Vosburgh says. A trust generates income for the donor throughout her life, then transfers the money to the charity when the term of the trust ends or the donor dies.

Benefactors also might consider donor-advised funds that nonprofits operate themselves. Funds also can be set up through charitable organizations, such as Rochester

Area Community Foundation, and investment firms. These vehicles allow giving-minded people to allocate money to charities through the years as they see fit.

People with large portfolios and estates have another option.

"With a family foundation the nice thing is you can benefit multiple causes," Vosburgh says. "You can set up a foundation that is there to annually make donations to charities, and then other family members can be involved in helping to run that and vet out charities."

Savvy non-profits make giving as simple as possible. Non-profits with their ducks in a row guide would-be donors through all their options. Kathy Reed, assistant vice president for major and planned giving at WXXI Public Broadcasting Council, is accustomed to providing information. Some donors participate in current giving, donating money or stock, Reed says. She finds that most people who own stock are familiar with the gift-giving process, but she occasionally fields calls asking for advice.

A straightforward bequest, such as designating an organization in a will, can be handled easily by an attorney, she adds. WXXI provides a template to make it easier to do. Donors also can change the beneficiary on an IRA, retirement account or insurance policy online and without legal help.

And non-profits are not waiting for the phones to ring. They hold creative events

that widen their pool of prospects and demystify the giving process. WXXI held two educational events in 2015: a planned-giving lunch and movie with legal and financial experts and an estate-planning event with a "Downton Abbey" theme.

"Both were well-attended, about 60 people at each, so it does show that people are interested in information," Reed says. As part of a Public Broadcasting Service project last year, the station also distributed personal financial record booklets to help people organize with an eye toward planning their estate.

"There are many ways for you to do multiple things with your gift in the estate planning area," says Meyers of the Al Sigl Community, "and a good attorney, a good accountant, a good financial planner would be in a position to help you."

Donors who are contemplating planned giving sometimes think the process is more complicated than it is, Reed adds.

"I can tell them a bit about the nuts and bolts, the charitable gift annuities or more sophisticated vehicles like trusts, but then I would send them to an attorney or a financial person to set it up," she says. "Some people already have those people in their lives; some don't. There are wonderful estate attorneys and financial planners in town who can advise them. I urge them to seek that professional advice."

Richard Zitrin is a Rochester-area freelance writer.