

Let the Giving Season Begin!

Autumn is here along with cooler temperatures, cozy sweaters, fall sports, and a hint of the holiday season to come. Up to 31% of all giving happens in the single month of December, which means it's time to start thinking about how you want to make an impact with your year-end giving.

Where do you start? Navigating the world of charitable causes can be overwhelming. Try this strategy: S-E-L-F. As in, be your best SELF. S is for starting today, E is for evaluating your values, L is for locating a charity, and F is for the feeling of joy you'll have once you've made the donation.

S – start today. Don't overthink your philanthropy – just get started. Today. That might mean going online to make a gift to your favorite charity using your donor advised fund, instead of writing a check. You will need the website or link to your donor advised fund administrator and your passwords, as well as the name of the charity and its EIN (tax ID) number, which you can find at Candid (formerly GuideStar), <https://www.guidestar.org/search>

E – evaluate your values. What matters most to you? Education? The arts? The environment? Translate your values into causes by simply prioritizing what is most important to you. Can't decide? Consider making a series of "test gifts" to a handful of charities until you get to know them and their work better. If you want to take a deeper dive to discover your "why," consider reading up on [values-based philanthropy](#).

L – locate a charity that matches your values and consider keeping those philanthropic dollars local. There are a host of navigation tools such as [Charity Navigator](#) to locate charities, including those where you can type in your zip code to find charities in your [neighborhood](#). You can save and sort through the requests you received in the mail from charities, and you can ask friends for referrals. Again, don't overthink it – cut the check to charity today.

F – feel the warmth and satisfaction of helping another person or an important cause– it's magical. If you aren't feeling connected to the charity, simply go onto their website, explore their mission and outcomes, and read about the lives that are being changed. If you desire personal contact, call or email the charity and request a tour or talk with a staff member who can share stories with you. Many charities' websites provide links to their financials including 990s, audits, and annual reports, so if you are motivated by numbers, you can access them. You can also find financials at [Candid](#).

As you are settling into autumn, go ahead and order that spiced latte or pumpkin soup, and then invest an hour of thoughtful reflection and research to set your philanthropy into motion.

Sharon Benson is an independent philanthropy advisor based in Portland who motivates families to be their best selves by activating their philanthropy. Learn more at www.sharonbbenson.com