

1 in 3 Americans Lacks Faith in Charities, Chronicle Poll Finds

By Suzanne Perry

Almost two-thirds of Americans have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in charities, according to [a new Chronicle poll](#) — the first to measure public views on that question since 2008. More than 80 percent said charities do a very good or somewhat good job helping people. But a significant number expressed concern about finances: A third said charities do a "not too good" or "not at all good" job spending money wisely; 41 percent said their leaders are paid too much.

Half said that in deciding where they will donate, it is very important for them to know that charities spend a low amount on salaries, administration, and fundraising; 34 percent said that was somewhat important.

And 35 percent said they had little or no confidence in charities.

The *Chronicle* poll, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, surveyed 1,000 adults in June, asking several questions identical to those included in polls that Princeton conducted from 2002 to 2008 on behalf of Paul Light, a professor of public service at New York University.

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Little Change

The key numbers have [barely budged since 2008](#), when 64 percent said they had a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in charities, compared with 62 percent in the new poll.

Americans rank charities higher than a range of other institutions. Fifteen percent said they had a great deal of confidence in charitable organizations over all, with 21 percent saying that about charities in their own communities. In a [June Gallup poll](#), only 4 percent said they had a great deal of

confidence in Congress, 9 percent in big business, 10 percent in newspapers, and 12 percent in banks, public schools, and organized labor. The top scorers: the military (42 percent) and small business (34 percent).

Among the *Chronicle* survey's other findings:

- Only 13 percent said charities do a very good job of spending money wisely, the lowest score in three categories. Of the other categories, 25 percent said they do a very good job helping people, and 18 percent a very good job running programs and services. While still the best score, the portion saying charities do a very good job of helping people has fallen from 34 percent in 2003.
- People who gave charities low marks on spending money wisely were asked what kind of spending they considered unwise. The biggest portion, 37 percent, cited salaries or other administrative costs. The second-highest answer, named by 11 percent, was advertising.
- When asked about factors that influence their giving, the biggest portion, 68 percent, said it is very important the charity has evidence that its programs are effective. The other factors, in addition to the 50 percent who favored low overhead spending: The charity gets good ratings from watchdogs, 54 percent; it works on a cause that has affected me or my loved ones, 39 percent; it only occasionally asks for money, 27 percent; and I know people who work there, 24 percent.
- About 75 percent said donors should get the same tax break no matter where they give, rejecting proposals that are occasionally floated to give bigger breaks to people who donate to charities that help the poor.

The survey found significant demographic differences in views toward charities. For example, young people were more positive than older people: 65 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds said they had a great deal or fair amount of confidence in charities, compared with 54 percent of people ages 65 and older.

Women had more confidence than men (66 percent to 57 percent), and college graduates had more than those with just some college (73 percent to 56 percent).

In addition:

- Republicans were more likely than Democrats to say nonprofits do a not-too-good or not-at-all-good job spending money wisely (38 percent and 22 percent, respectively). Whites were more likely to say that than nonwhites (36 percent and 27 percent).
- Democrats were more likely than Republicans to say gifts for the poor should get bigger tax breaks than those to other causes (23 percent and 15 percent). But 90 percent of people earning \$50,000 to \$74,900 most strongly believed that all donations should get the same tax breaks, and 70 percent to 79 percent of people in other income groups agreed.
- Sixty-two percent of people earning at least \$75,000 said it was very important that charities spend low amounts on salaries, administration, and fundraising, compared with only 43 percent of those earning \$30,000 to \$49,000.

Survey respondents were interviewed by landlines and cellphones. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.6 percentage points. Full copies of the survey and more analysis of the results are available exclusively to Chronicle subscribers.

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