



Not everyone has the best of intentions, please read our guidance on steering clear of bogus causes and suppliers.

Avoiding scams

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Sadly there are various scams associated with volunteer fundraising.

BOGUS CHARITIES

Occasionally someone will ask you to fundraise for, or donate to, a charity that does not exist. If you are approached to fundraise for a cause and you have any reason to be suspicious, you may want to carry out the following checks first:

- look for registered charity numbers and check them on the [Charity Commission's](#) or OSCR's (Office of the Scottish Charity Register) websites. Although there are occasions when an organisation is genuine but not on the register, this is a good place to start.
- take the company number, if there is one. You can check this on the register of companies at [Companies House](#)
- ask for the full address and telephone numbers (PO boxes, and mobiles are not sufficient) of the organisation
- if you have any doubts, ask for more information or details of other ways that you can get involved and say you will donate later

Of course, if you are being asked to fundraise for an individual, they will not have a charity or company number. You should ask yourself why this cause is not being supported through a registered charity and carry out your own checks to reassure yourself that the cause is genuine.

For further information about scams, see the [Institute of Fundraising's briefing](#) and Consumer Direct's [advice on bogus clothing collections](#).

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BOGUS DONORS

Sometimes charities and individuals involved in fundraising are approached by a donor that is unknown to them and are offered a very large sum of money. This could be wonderful news, and the happy result of your publicity efforts. However, it should always be carefully checked by the charity or cause before you accept the donation and you should not take responsibility for this yourself.

This is particularly true if the donation is to be paid by cheque from an offshore account and the donor asks you to repay a small proportion of the cheque value back to them to cover 'handling' or any other sort of costs incurred. It is quite possible that the cheque is not genuine and as soon as you have made the payment back to the supposed donor the cheque will fail to clear.

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BOGUS OR MISLEADING SUPPLIERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

There are thousands of genuine suppliers and service providers who offer a good service so don't let the few who mislead, or simply break the law, put you off using them. Do check the supplier or service provider before you agree to work with them. This list is not exclusive, but you should carefully consider suppliers and service that:

seem to be relying on your list of contacts to sell their products

If they are offering you a percentage of the income from the sales, be very clear how that percentage will be paid to you and when. Make sure you know what percentage will be paid in every instance and how this will be recorded. Consider whether you need to record what you have sold, so that you are able to check the supplier's record of how much they owe you against your own record. Ask for references and check that the supplier pays in full and on time. Remember your legal obligations under the [Data Protection Act](#) and do not give details of your contacts to suppliers unless you are absolutely certain that you have permission from individuals to share their details with the supplier.

imply that you will raise surprisingly large amounts of money

This is particularly true if the fundraising activity requires you to invest a large amount of your time and effort. Consider whether you are really likely to raise the sums suggested by the supplier or are they actually using you as a form of cheap labour to promote and manage a 'product' that is not actually very cost effective?

Some sorts of fundraising are not cost effective if all the volunteer time is factored in, but they are very important for [building a community](#) of supporters or just helping to build a community. To some extent fetes are a good example of this. Fetes are worth very much more than the funds they raise because they are often a local tradition and part of our cultural heritage whilst also facilitating publicity for causes.

use up valuable volunteer time for a limited return

You can only ask your friends, family and other supporters in your group to do so many things each year. If you doubt that a supplier's, or service provider's, product is a good return on time invested, think carefully about asking people to engage with them.

For example, collecting plastic bottle tops and sending them to a service provider to be recycled, in return for a very, very modest payment per bottle top may be a mistake. It may take too long to raise a significant donation and people may be disheartened. You might want to save up people's goodwill for a fundraising activity that offers a better return on the time they invest.

ask you to pay them money with the promise of a payment to you later

Clearly, if you are hiring items from a supplier to run an event yourself, then you will expect to make a payment to the supplier. For example, you may hire 300 rubber ducks for a duck race and then sell tickets to people to enter the race. The funds you raise will be income from the sale of the tickets, less the cost of hiring the ducks (and any other costs, such as advertising).

However, if a supplier or service provider offers to run the event for you and wants to collect all the income, then you should question why.

You should also be very clear about how the income will be accounted for; will you be certain that they are giving you a true account of all the income raised? When and how will the income be paid to you? As you can see, this situation leaves you vulnerable to fraud and you should consider carefully whether it exposes you to too much risk.

Charity Commission Safer Giving Campaign

The Charity Commission has joined forces with various organisations across the country including local authorities, major supermarkets, shopping centres, Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Advertising Standards Authority to promote its [Safer Giving](#) campaign. The main aim of the campaign is to raise public awareness about safe ways to donate to charity and to stamp out fraudulent collections which have nothing to do with genuine good causes.

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