

Key Questions to Ask A Charity

Because Irish charities perform a public role, people in Ireland – and our beneficiaries at home and overseas - have a legitimate reason to expect high standards of performance and transparency from them.

NGOs should be held to account by the public in regard to the decisions they make and how public funds entrusted to them are allocated.

Irish NGOs are a vital part of our ‘civil society’, providing vital services and helping people overcome marginalisation, exclusion and poverty. They need the public’s support and trust to play that role effectively – support and trust that are based on NGOs’ ability to fully account for their decisions and actions.

In this document, Dóchas lists six key questions that people in Ireland can use to determine whether an organisation is providing a strong basis for the trust placed in them. We encourage people to support all charities and organisations that provide good answers to these questions.

1. Does the organisation publish its accounts on its website and are they easily accessible?

All charities (organisations that benefit from being recognised as having a charitable purpose) are custodians of public funds and need to provide detailed information on where they raised the money and what they have done with it. Has the organisation published audited accounts? Does the organisation provide information on the sources of income, the CEO’s salary and the costs of governance and programme quality control?

2. Can the organisation prove that the work it is doing is effective?

Good organisations don’t merely tell you what they intend to do, or how hard they are working; they have clear indicators to measure progress toward the achievement of their goals. It is important to ask any charity how its actions link to its stated aims, and what evidence it has that its strategy is working

3. Can the organisation clearly explain the reasons behind the work it is doing?

Any organisation should be able to explain the background to its programmes and the means by which it will work, in the short-term and longer-term, towards positive change. It is not enough to list a series of activities and intentions. Good charities should be able to present the logic behind their work, in a way that makes sense.

4. **Does the organisation apply professional standards to its work?**

The most effective NGOs have strong internal systems, and apply professional standards and codes of conduct to their work, such as the Dóchas Code on Corporate Governance, the Fundraising Code of Practice or other technical guidelines. Does the organisation provide any information on whether it has signed onto these codes, and how it is applying them to its work?

5. **How does the organisation coordinate its work with others, and how does it ensure that organisation's beneficiaries have a say in its decision-making?**

The ultimate judges of an organisation's effectiveness are the people who are the intended beneficiaries. It is important to ask how an NGO knows those people's real needs and how they relate to other NGOs or government programmes in the countries they operate in.

6. **Does the organisation overly simplify complex issues?**

Telling the truth and defending the dignity of people are important in portraying the realities - positive and negative - in developing countries. Many NGOs have chosen to address this through becoming a signatory to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages. Does the NGO use overly simplistic or sensationalist public communications, or does it make a genuine attempt to explain the complexities of its work? Do you feel that the organisation actively encourages you to get involved, and does it encourage you to ask more questions?

And finally: Are you willing to make a long-term commitment to the organisation?

To really make a difference, giving to charity should be a long-term commitment. Good giving is motivated by altruism, knowledge, and perspective. If the charity in question has provided you with satisfactory answers to the questions above, please consider making a commitment to support the organisation in a strategic way, and support those areas of work that the organisation is finding hardest to get funded.

For more information please visit www.dochas.ie, or contact us in the Dóchas Office on 01 4053801 or via email at media@dochas.ie.

Dóchas, The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

1-2 Baggot Court, Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2, Ireland

Tel: 01 405 3801 Email: media@dochas.ie