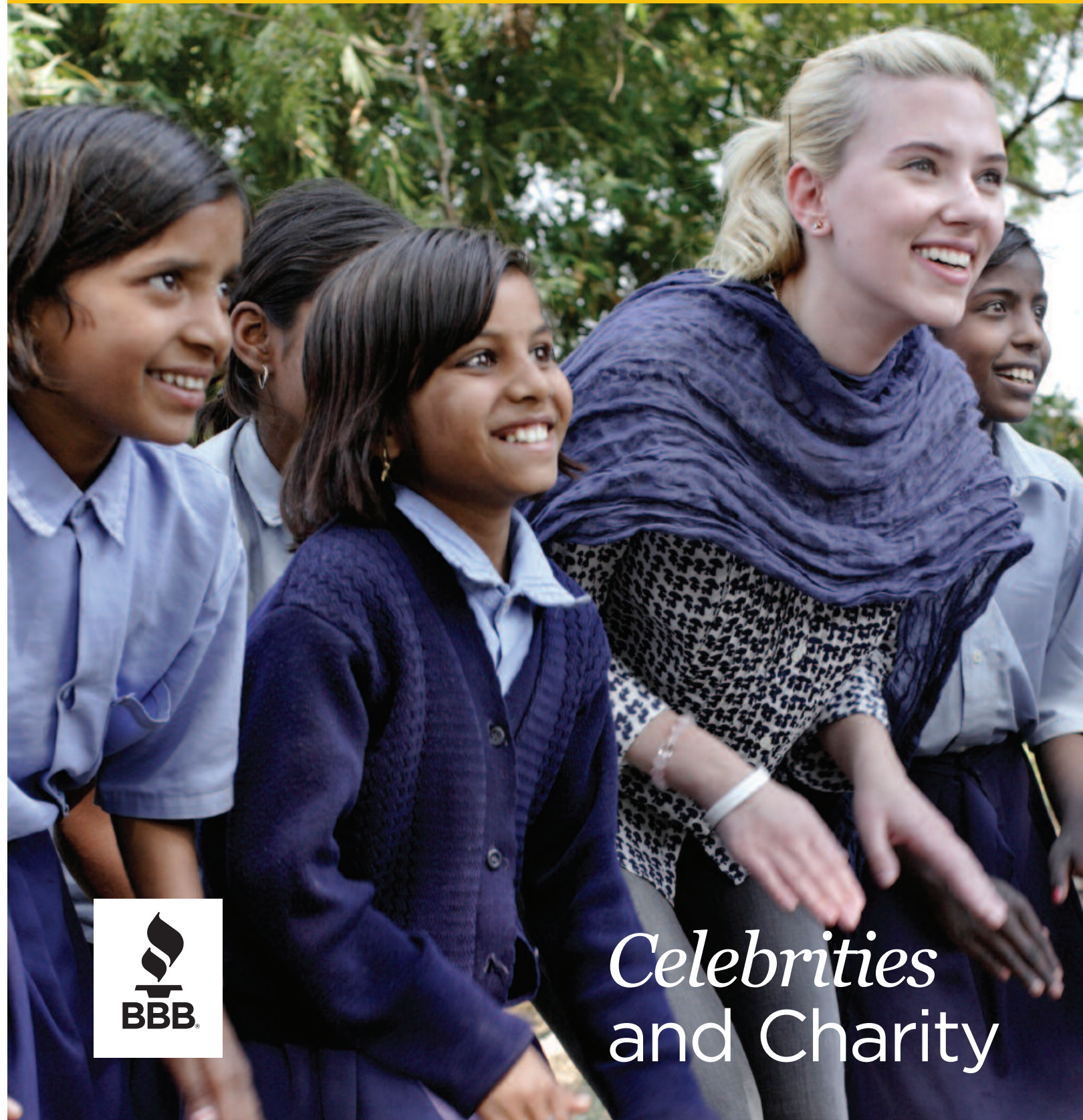


Combined Fall and Holiday 2010 issue (see page 1.)

# WISE GIVING™

GUIDE

BBB WISE GIVING ALLIANCE : FALL/HOLIDAY 2010



*Celebrities  
and Charity*



A Publication of the  
BBB Wise Giving Alliance

The *Wise Giving Guide* is published three times a year to help donors make more informed giving decisions. This guide includes a compilation of the latest evaluation conclusions completed by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance.

If you would like to see a particular topic discussed in this guide, please email suggestions to [give@council.bbb.org](mailto:give@council.bbb.org) or write to us at the address below.

#### FALL/HOLIDAY ISSUE 2010

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# president's MESSAGE

As our cover indicates, this *Wise Giving Guide* combines into one issue the separate Fall and Holiday issues we published in past years. Our decision to publish the *Guide* three times rather than four in 2010 was difficult but necessary. While we enjoy producing them, each *Guide* requires diverting significant staff time away from charity evaluations. In 2005 we had roughly 500 organizations on our list of charities. Today there are more than 1,200, and growing. We find we also need to devote more resources to our website and other technological resources. To keep evaluations current, manage critical technology and not significantly increase our costs, something had to go. So, after much deliberation, we determined that we could best serve you by eliminating one *Guide* and focusing on the charity evaluations you want.

For this *Guide*, we've chosen for our cover story a subject that's familiar yet often only hazily understood—the role of celebrities in charity. Whatever you think of celebrities' prominence in American life generally, we hope you'll find interesting our look at the ways in which charities involve famous names in their work. You'll see how competition and strategy are part of the matching game and how, at times, the link of a big name and a charitable cause is not a success.

As the year draws to a close, I find much to give us heart. Charitable giving continues strong, even if not at previous levels. Charities find innovative ways to meet growing needs. And you, as thoughtful donors, tell us that charity accountability still matters to you.

We at the Alliance thank you for the support that makes our work possible. We look forward to serving you in 2011—and to better times for us all.



H. Art Taylor, *President*



# Celebrities and Charity

Celebrities and charity pairings have a long and sometimes rocky history. Sports figures in particular have had problems in philanthropic ventures, but stories of self-promoting stunts, off-camera high jinks or out-size “perks” for supposedly free appearances can make the public ambivalent about the sincerity of celebrities in all fields and even skeptical about the motives of the charities that engage them.

Yet for decades celebrities and charities have found mutual benefit in joining forces. Putting a recognizable face on an abstract cause has brought charity into more lives more often than would have been possible without them. Adding altruism to entertainment has not only burnished many a professional image; it has also, for many, proved deeply gratifying.

There’s no sign that this happy relationship is weakening. If anything, it is growing in both scope and complexity. There are new players, new roles, new alliances and new lines of communication. Unless you’re totally disconnected, a star has reached out to you on a charity’s behalf. Most likely you’ve seen galaxies.

Look to the Stars, a Web site that reports on celebrity-charity linkings ([www.looktothestars.org](http://www.looktothestars.org)), recently listed 2,247 celebrities and 1,578 charities, and that’s only a fraction of each group in the nation at large. Anyone who could identify every star on the roster would presumably become a celebrity, too.

Show business and major sports may still be the main sources of celebrity-for-charity, but boundaries have stretched. Show business now includes chefs and home decorators, and snowboarders and ping-pong players make the sports pages. The definition of celebrity has become so elastic that, as is said, some people are famous only for being famous. Charities have also proliferated, more than doubling, to over a million, since the early 1990s.

Beneath the flux is the enduring attraction between celebrity and charity. Though many motives may be at play on both sides, public attention—favorable, of course—is one thing they both want.

But what’s happening is much more than same old, same old, just writ larger. Celebrities still smile at gala fund raising dinners, speak earnestly of the charity’s work, or even perform in multi-channel telethons, but that’s rarely their unique involvement. Increasingly they act as charities’ spokespersons before legislators; meet with participants in a charity’s program; serve on charity governing boards; set up private foundations or found their own publicly soliciting charities. They tweet charity messages. Some have taken their charitable “causes” into global politics. There seems no place they can’t go, little they can’t do.

And we hardly blink! It’s unlikely that silent film stars Mary Pickford or Douglas Fairbanks, who lent their names and support to the American Red Cross during



World War I, conferred with French or British heads of state, but it's barely a news note when actress Angelina Jolie talks of displaced people with leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina or U2 lead singer Bono discusses charity with Russian President Medvedev. Or even when Dolly Parton talks to Girl Scouts.

For donors, though, the issue isn't how far afield stars now go but how much they should matter, if at all, in giving decisions. We go behind the scenes of the celebrity-charity business to answer a few questions about tactics, strategies and terms of engagement.

## With so many celebrities at large, shouldn't any charity find it easy to engage one?

Despite the excess of celebrities shown on looktothestars.org, charity suitors far outnumber the most-desired stars (who, it's important to remember, also have day jobs). Celebrities sometimes come to a charity, but more often, the tie begins with a matchmaker.

Lyndsay Cruz, who has brought numerous celebrities to **Oxfam America**, says obtaining their services is a highly competitive business. As the agency's public figures special advisor, she works in Los Angeles, close not only to stars of the film industry but to the talent agents and publicists whom they employ. Guardians and promoters of their clients' interests and talents, these are key players, and for Cruz, and others with similar jobs, knowing them, and helping them know the kinds of celebrity involvement your charity is looking for, is critical.

At their regular meetings, talent agents go through lists of activities in which charities have made known that they are seeking celebrity involvement. The openings are aired: Does anyone have a client who might be interested in this opportunity or that? The agents come up with names, and from there, in time, a match may be made. Not all causes find apt or available recruits.

Like Oxfam America, many large charities have in recent years developed staff positions devoted solely to enlisting recognizable names and managing their work on the charity's behalf. They research potential candidates, looking for personality assets and liabilities, attachment to the charity's work, and increasingly, their appeal to certain audiences that the charity wants to reach. Once they persuade (or accept) suitable and willing celebrities, they teach them about the tasks they're taking on and do the meticulous planning that gets them to the right place, with the right message, at the right time. They're sometimes called "wranglers."

## Wouldn't charities be happy to engage virtually any Big Name?

While many organizations do not lay down strict qualifications for the notables that appear on their behalf, the trend among larger organizations especially is to weigh the value of candidate stars from multiple perspectives. When today's big charities describe their celebrity programs, they talk of *brand*, *marketing*, and *target audience*, a clear signal that celebrities now play roles in a multi-faceted and carefully tended plan for getting the charity's core message to the public, or a particular segment of it.

Like corporations, charities speak of their "brand," the image that's meant to convey their identity, the values they represent. Getting the brand "out there" is a large part of marketing. Usually it involves segmentation—targeting specific audiences, such as a certain generation, ethnic group or gender, through specific intermediaries.

The **Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation**, whose longstanding spokesperson has been Mary Tyler Moore, has also brought on board celebrities too young

**Far Left:** Country music artist Randy Owen with St. Jude patients. *Photo: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital*

**Left:** WWE Superstar John Cena, wish granter, with wish kid. *Photo: Make-A-Wish Foundation*



to evoke nostalgia. Crystal Bowersox, a 24-year-old American Idol finalist who, like Moore, has type 1 diabetes, recently joined the Foundation's team. Nick Jonas, at 18 the youngest of the Jonas Brothers, who also has diabetes, has become national chairman of the Foundation's fund raising campaign, the Walk to Cure Diabetes. The prior national chairman of the Walk, Kevin Kline, is 63.

But forget generation gaps. Counterintuitive matches can be hugely successful. Dolly Parton has been a big hit with the **Girl Scouts of Tanasi Council**, in Tennessee, and the title of her song "Coat of Many Colors" has been integrated into a Scout program.

Interest groups are also segments. Surely **Oxfam America** was looking ultimately to target foodies when it sent Food Network celebrity chef Giada De Laurentiis to Peru to speak with small-scale farmers. Her TV series has featured Oxfam's work.

Branding and marketing arrangements increasingly include commercial sponsors as well. At the **Girl Scouts of America**, Dominique Dawes, the Olympic gymnast/medalist and motivational speaker, is spokesperson for the "Girl Scout/Dove self-esteem program," in which celebrity, charity and the Dove corporation, maker of hygiene and beauty products, join to deliver the message that real beauty is far more than looks.

## Not to be cynical, but don't celebrities cost charities a lot, in one way or another?

In general, celebrities aren't paid for their service. Charities do generally pay related expenses, however. These could include transportation, meals and lodging for the star and at least one other person. A make-up artist and hair stylist may be provided for personal appearances and photo ops. Maintaining a certain atmosphere is expensive but adds value: limousines rather than cabs help give stars the glamour that their fans expect.

Costs of performances, like concerts, can run especially high. Even if the stars are not paid, or get a reduced fee, the services of their back-up performers and technicians and equipment transport are not usually donated. Expenses of benefit performances have at times left little monetary benefit to the cause.

Charities say that celebrities bring value far exceeding any costs. Their fans will follow them virtually anywhere. They also have professional contacts—other stars or even commercial sponsors whom they can

attract to their charitable interest. They have access to multiple public platforms.

In a *Vogue* article featuring actress Natalie Portman, for example, Portman's words about FINCA International, a microfinance organization she works with, brought the charity to the eyes of fashionistas. Giada De Laurentiis described on her blog her trip to Peru with Oxfam America, and (her own idea) put Oxfam inserts in each book sold on a tour for a cookbook she wrote.

## Do all charities involve celebrities in pretty much the same ways?

Actually, there are marked differences of focus and scale. A few examples:

- At **Make-A-Wish Foundation** celebrities aren't asked to appear before audiences of hundreds or thousands, for the most part. Their audiences, in fact, are very small—the individual children whose wish is to meet a favorite celebrity or athlete. This puts celebrities at the core of the Foundation's program, granting the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions. Considering that eligible wish-makers must be between the ages of 2-1/2 and 18 at the time of referral, the range of candidate celebrities or athletes is enormous and unpredictable.

Pop singer/songwriter Amy Grant, American Red Cross National Celebrity Cabinet member.  
*Photo: American Red Cross*



Lorie Hennessey, director of the Foundation's celebrity and national sports program, says that the names the children request never cease to amaze her. An eight-year-old wanted to meet jazz musician Dave Brubeck. Another child requested singer Andy Williams. Some celebrities or athletes are asked for again and again. The World Wrestling Entertainment superstar John Cena and NASCAR drivers Jeff Gordon and Dale Earnhardt Jr., for example, have granted more than two hundred wishes each over the years. Wish-granting meetings have a deep effect on everyone involved, Hennessey says, often leaving the celebrity awed by the child's strength and resilience.

- For many years the **American Red Cross** frequently called on celebrities, but their involvement was episodic. Today it has a "National Celebrity Cabinet" of 43 members from the world of entertainment and beyond. Included are a TV weatherman, a race car driver and a psychologist.

Julie Thurmond Whitmer, director of celebrity outreach, says that the "cabinet" arrangement has enabled the Red Cross to develop engaged and long-term relationships with celebrities. All are on call for a one-year term to promote the Red Cross mission through donating their "time, talent, passion and energy."

Taping public service announcements, appearing on satellite media tours, and even tweeting, Cabinet members deliver Red Cross messages and encourage contributions of money, blood and volunteer time. Actress Jamie Lee Curtis promotes the Red Cross'

disaster preparedness program. Pop singer/songwriter Amy Grant is the primary celebrity spokesperson for the Holiday Mail for Heroes program, which is supported by Pitney-Bowes.

- **Oxfam America** has also formed a group of celebrities to bring attention to its work. Its "Global Ambassadors" take fact-finding trips to sites of Oxfam programs to learn about local conditions and see in action the work that they later promote and support in a variety of ways. Actress Scarlett Johansson's visit to Sri Lanka brought attention to Oxfam's anti-poverty efforts. Actress Kristin Davis has appeared on TV to talk of her trip to Southern and Eastern Africa and appeal for donations to support Oxfam programs there.

- **St. Jude Children's Research Hospital**<sup>®</sup> had a celebrity founder, entertainer Danny Thomas, whose daughter, actress and producer Marlo Thomas, is national outreach director. Today, hundreds of celebrities, including music artists, actors, athletes and others, are active in the 34,000 fund raising events, national and local, that St. Jude conducts annually.

Country Cares for St. Jude Kids, a radiothon fund raising event since 1989, involves country music artists like Randy Owen, who founded the program, and many others who perform, make recorded appeals, and visit children in the hospital. Here the celebrities

Celebrity chef Giada De Laurentiis in Peru with Oxfam America. *Photo: Oxfam America*



are part of an undertaking that also draws in country radio stations and other segments of the country music industry, including artist managers, songwriters, and record label managers.

Another major St. Jude fund raising event featuring celebrities is Thanks and Giving, conducted each year from Thanksgiving through Christmas. Stars do ads and public service announcements, go online, tweet, use social media and generally add their fame to “power up” the campaign.

St. Jude also goes straight to celebrities’ fans through its Fans Care for St. Jude Kids program, offering fan clubs of all sorts the opportunity to donate to St. Jude as a way of honoring the celebrities whom they, well, celebrate.

## Can star power fail?

Charity and celebrity aren’t inevitably a good match. When the hip-hop star Wyclef Jean announced almost immediately after the Haitian earthquake this year that he was seeking funds to help through his **YeLe Haiti Foundation**, donations poured in. His celebrity, along with his Haitian birth, brought instant media attention.

Jean’s celebrity status certainly helped donations mount to over a million dollars in the first few days of his appeals. But the bright lights didn’t let up when he had to respond to criticism about the charity’s late filing of required IRS reports, financial transactions with board members, including Jean himself, and expenses whose relation to the foundation’s purpose was unclear. Jean subsequently denied charges and announced changes in the foundation’s operations.

Celebrity-founded charities don’t necessarily draw bad publicity; ALSAC/St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, for one, has not. But all too often popular figures set up charities with scant knowledge of what they’re taking on. The reputations of sports figures Michael Jordan and Sammy Sosa suffered when their charitable foundations’ payments to family members and inadequate spending for charitable purposes came to light.

Even in the absence of questionable doings, a revered name doesn’t guarantee effective charity. In “Babe Ruth Hit Home Runs but His Foundation Struck Out,” (*Trusts & Estates*, August 2009), Mary C. Moran describes how the Babe Ruth Foundation, set up over a year before Ruth’s death in 1948, floundered for several years before becoming essentially dormant in the early 1950s.

In this case the main deterrents to success, according to Moran’s research, were that the board and staff

Don’t rely on a celebrity as the sole indicator of a charity’s reliability. Famed personalities know how to please audiences but not necessarily how to vet charities.

couldn’t decide where they wanted the foundation to go or how to get to get there. Its directors were averse to putting money into fund raising, evidently convinced that any money acquired should be devoted to furthering the organization’s (shifting) programs. The fund raising appeals that were made were ineffective.

## Any tips for a star-struck donor?

The people in charge of the Babe Ruth Foundation may have thought that his name alone would attract contributions and that good works would flow from good vibes. Without knocking the vibes, may we suggest again that competence and commitment matter far more to a charity’s success? Here are thoughts to consider as you view the celebrity who appears on a charity’s behalf:

1. Don’t rely on a celebrity as the sole indicator of a charity’s reliability. Famed personalities know how to please audiences but not necessarily how to vet charities.
2. Be wary of newly established charities that as yet offer little beyond a celebrity connection. A good organization may be in the making, but only a track record can give assurance.
3. Fund raising events featuring stars can be expensive, but keep in mind that charities often consider less-than-expected financial results offset by the value of public attention brought to their cause.
4. A celebrity spokesperson’s misstep or misbehavior need not tarnish the name of the sponsoring charity. Weigh the whole situation and how it’s handled.
5. Length and depth of service to a charity are useful indications of a celebrity’s altruistic credibility, but in giving decisions, it’s the charity that must gain your confidence.

With that in mind (and your cell phone off), you’re ready to sit back, relax and enjoy the show. ■