COUNTRY GUIDE



AMERICAS

United States.

There is no general federal duty to help a stranger, but a few states have narrow duty statutes, and federal and state laws protect some volunteers and food donors from liability. Federal tax law allows a deduction for gifts to qualified charities, and a federal agency, AmeriCorps, runs national service programs.

DUTY TO HELP A STRANGER

Varies by region

PROTECTION FOR HELPERS

Varies by region

GIVING AND SERVICE

5 programs and laws

Is there a legal duty to help a stranger?

VARIES BY REGION

The sources checked show duties only in some state statutes. Vermont (12 V.S.A. § 519) requires a person who knows another is exposed to grave physical harm to give reasonable assistance if this can be done without danger or peril to themselves or without interfering with important duties to others, with a fine of up to $100 for a willful violation. Minnesota (Minn. Stat. § 604A.01) imposes a similar duty, enforced as a petty misdemeanor, and Wisconsin (Wis. Stat. § 940.34) requires a person who knows a crime is being committed and a victim is exposed to bodily harm to summon law enforcement or other assistance, or to provide assistance.

12 V.S.A. § 519. Emergency medical care (Vermont General Assembly) Sec. 604A.01 MN Statutes (Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes) Wisconsin Legislature: 940.34 (Wisconsin Legislature)

Are people who help protected?

VARIES BY REGION

Federal law has two narrow protections: the Volunteer Protection Act (42 U.S.C. § 14503) limits liability of volunteers of nonprofits and governmental entities acting within their responsibilities, and the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (42 U.S.C. § 1791) protects good-faith donors of apparently wholesome food and grocery products to nonprofits, absent gross negligence or intentional misconduct. Emergency-aid Good Samaritan protection is mainly state law; for example, Minnesota § 604A.01 subd. 2 gives general immunity to a person who renders emergency care without compensation or expectation of compensation, subject to the statute's exceptions.

42 U.S. Code § 14503 - Limitation on liability for volunteers (Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School) 42 U.S. Code § 1791 - Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School) Sec. 604A.01 MN Statutes (Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes)

How the government promotes giving and service

Charitable contribution deduction (26 U.S.C. § 170)

Federal income tax law allows a deduction for charitable contributions to qualified organizations. The IRS states that taxpayers may deduct such gifts if they itemize, generally up to 50 percent of adjusted gross income, with 20 and 30 percent limits in some cases.

LEGAL INFORMATION INSTITUTE, CORNELL LAW SCHOOL

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps describes itself as the federal agency connecting individuals and organizations to tackle the nation's most pressing challenges, and lists programs such as AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA, NCCC and AmeriCorps Seniors.

AMERICORPS

Martin Luther King, Jr., Service Day grants (42 U.S.C. § 12653)
The national service statute lets the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps) make grants to plan and carry out service opportunities in conjunction with the federal holiday honoring Dr. King, activities reflecting cooperation and understanding among groups, nonviolent conflict resolution and social justice.
LEGAL INFORMATION INSTITUTE, CORNELL LAW SCHOOL

Presidential Citizens Medal (Executive Order 11494)
Established in 1969 to recognize citizens who have performed exemplary deeds of service for their country or their fellow citizens; the President may bestow it.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES, OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER

Federal holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday (5 U.S.C. § 6103)
The third Monday in January is a legal public holiday for federal employees; the service-grant authority above ties service opportunities to this day.
LEGAL INFORMATION INSTITUTE, CORNELL LAW SCHOOL

Ways to give and volunteer

The US has a huge number of charities, and most of the work of checking them is left to you. Start by confirming a group's tax-exempt status with the IRS.

Check a charity before you give

Look up any US nonprofit to see whether it is recognized as tax-exempt and eligible to receive deductible gifts.

IRS Tax Exempt Organization Search

Give your time

American Red Cross volunteering

Roles in disaster relief, blood drives and service to military families.

AmeriCorps
The federal agency for national service, with a search for service and volunteer opportunities.

National VOAD
The coalition of disaster-relief organizations, with guidance on volunteering safely in a disaster.

Idealist (includes VolunteerMatch)
A nonprofit site that lists volunteer opportunities and now includes VolunteerMatch.

Give money, blood or a donation

American Red Cross: donate blood
Find a blood drive or donation center near you.

Organ Donor (HRSA)
The federal site for learning about donation and how to register as an organ donor.

Feeding America food bank finder
Find a local food bank in the national network.

BBB Wise Giving Alliance (Give.org)
A charity standards body that reports on whether national charities meet its accountability standards.

In an emergency or a crisis

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
Free, confidential support by call or text to 988, any time.

Before you act

- Check the charity in the IRS search and look for the exact name, since scammers copy well-known names, especially after disasters. Never pay by gift card, wire or cash app to a caller, and do not give to pressure calls. Each state also regulates charitable solicitation, and visitors should confirm that volunteering is allowed under their visa.

This list does not cover local nonprofits, faith groups or crowdfunding platforms. Checked 2026-10-28. Listing an organization is not an endorsement, and none of them has endorsed this site. Some official sites block automatic checks, so a link may need a second try.

One thing worth knowing

Federal law pairs a public holiday with statutory authority for service grants (the King Day of Service), and the Presidential Citizens Medal was created specifically to honor exemplary service to fellow citizens.

What this does not mean

Duty-to-assist statutes exist only in a few states, and the sources checked do not describe how often they are enforced. Good Samaritan law varies by state, the federal protections are narrow, and a deduction applies only to those who itemize. Laws change, and nothing here is legal advice. This is a plain-language summary of public sources, not legal advice, and it does not rank countries. No government named here has endorsed this site. Not reviewed by a lawyer. Statutes were read in public sources and may have changed. Last checked October 26, 2026.



thisisdisclosure.com

A free message about how we treat each other. Nothing to buy, nothing to join. One person’s hypothesis, not advice. Woodcut images were made with AI tools; the words are Keith Adler’s. Share freely.