**Nonprofit Activity Types**

The Internal Revenue Code describes the allowable purposes of 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations to be serving religious, educational, charitable, scientific, and literary purposes. This broad definition encompasses a wide variety of organizations — from those conducting medical research to those providing free legal services to low-income families to those preserving historic sites. We’ve organized a quick overview of categories and kinds of activities.

**Arts, culture, and humanities**

This category probably makes you think of museums and concert halls. You’re right, but that’s not all. They belong here along with these organizations:

\* Organizations and activities that further enjoyment and understanding of all kinds of arts

\* Media and communications organizations

\* Groups furthering the understanding of history and genealogy

\* Halls of fame

\* Historic-preservation groups

\* Organizations offering services to artists, writers, and performers

\* Organizations for the training and education of artists, writers, and performers

Did you think of heredity-based organizations, such as Sons of the Revolution or United Daughters of the Confederacy? They belong here, too — along with nonprofit circuses!

**Education**

You thought schools belonged in the education category, and you were right. This category is made up of formally constituted educational institutions (except art schools) and organizations that administer or support those institutions. It also includes the following:

\* Libraries

\* Continuing-education centers

\* Other activities supporting learning outside formal schools — such as literacy and language-learning programs

\* Related services, including testing programs and scholarships

**Environmental quality, protection, and beautification**

You may have thought of beautification and open space programs, and, yes, those fit here. So do programs to control pollution and conserve natural resources. Farmlands and fisheries are classified in other categories.

**Animal related**

Services in this category include humane societies, programs to protect animals from exploitation, wildlife preservation, veterinary services, and zoos. Aquariums? Yep, they fit here. So do services for training and exhibiting animals.

**Health**

Hang onto your hat. This wide-ranging category includes the following:

\* Hospitals of all kinds

\* Outpatient clinics

\* Rehabilitation and therapy centers

\* Public health programs

\* Blood banks

\* Search-and-rescue squads

\* Organ and tissue donor programs

\* First-aid training programs

\* Health insurance providers

\* Bioethics groups

\* Programs to support patients and their families with counseling, housing, or financial aid

\* Mental health, crisis intervention, counseling support, and hotlines

\* Health associations working on behalf of prevention or treatment of specific illnesses

\* Medical research groups

**Human services**

If you thought the health category was broad, wait until you see the scope of human services. We break it down into subcategories:

\* Organizations to protect the public from crime, as well as services for prisoners and ex-offenders

\* Job-development, training, and rehabilitation programs

\* Food services such as Meals on Wheels and food banks

\* Farm-related projects such as animal husbandry and farm preservation

\* Housing needs — encompassing development, construction, and management of housing, tenants’ rights, and housing search assistance

\* Programs to advance public safety, including disaster preparedness, food protection, rescue squads, and first-aid training

\* Recreation, sports, leisure, and athletics, including camps, playgrounds, amateur sports clubs and competitions, and fitness centers

\* Youth development, including Boys and Girls Clubs, scouting organizations, service and future professionals’ clubs, and citizenship programs

\* Multipurpose organizations such as the Red Cross and Volunteers of America

\* Children and youth services, including orphanages and adoption programs

\* Services for families, such as parent education and domestic violence shelters

\* Personal services such as financial counseling and mediation

\* Emergency food, clothing, and financial assistance programs

\* Residential and custodial care programs

\* Services to promote the independence of specific population groups such as seniors, immigrants, and persons with disabilities

**International/foreign affairs**

The arena of international and foreign affairs includes the following:

\* International exchange programs

\* Economic development and relief programs

\* Policy research and analysis groups

\* Peace and security organizations, such as those promoting the control of biological weapons

\* International human rights groups

\* Organizations addressing migration and refugee issues

\* International relations groups

**Public, societal benefit**

This broad category includes the following:

\* Civil rights groups

\* Voter education programs

\* Advocacy groups for civil liberties such as freedom of religion

\* Community-improvement and economic-development organizations

\* Philanthropic organizations

\* Social-science and science-and-technology research institutes

\* Government policy reform groups

\* Citizen participation groups

\* Leadership-development programs

\* Telecommunications services

**Religion related**

Religion-related organizations are operated for the purpose of worship, religious training or study, or governance or administration of religions. They attract the largest portion of their support from individuals.

Many foundations, corporations, and government agencies don’t award grants directly to religion-related organizations (to avoid promoting a specific religious point of view, to maintain a separation of church and state, and because churches aren’t required to report their finances for public or IRS scrutiny).

Many religious organizations conduct important charitable work by serving people who may or may not be part of their congregations. Some of them form independent nonprofit organizations to manage such charitable projects. These include AIDS hospices, refugee services, low-income housing, soup kitchens, and shelters for battered women. Grantmakers more frequently support 501(c)(3) charitable organizations created by churches.