

Professional Advisor

Donna Ryan is a principal in the tax services department at Baker Newman & Noyes in Portland. Ryan specializes in individual, estate and trust tax matters, as well as personal financial planning.



Discovering “What Might Be”

As a financial advisor Donna Ryan seeks to help her clients discover the many ways they can fulfill their charitable aspirations. She considers herself blessed to be able to work with many charitably- and community-minded Mainers.

Ryan earned a Bachelor of Science degree in education from the College of Saint Rose and a J.D. from the University of Maine School of Law. She holds the designations of Personal Financial Specialist and Certified Public Accountant. She is a member of the Maine Society of Certified Public Accountants, the American Institute of CPAs and the Maine Estate Planning Council. Ryan serves as a trustee for the Maine Historical Society and the Gray Public Library Association, and is on the Planned Giving Committee at the Maine Medical Center.

In conversation with Jennifer Southard, Director of Philanthropic Services at the Maine Community Foundation, Ryan shared stories and advice related to helping clients learn about the benefits of charitable giving.

MCF: Do clients come in already thinking about where a charitable gift might go or is there a conversation to identify where their interests lie?

Donna Ryan: Often the first thing people think about when they consider charitable giving are the income tax benefits. I often sug-

gest to clients that lifetime charitable giving can have multiple benefits. Yes, there are income tax benefits, but you are also removing assets from your estate and you get to see your dollars in action.

Some clients have clear ideas about the things they want to fund. Others have been giving small amounts to a few select charities, but have never really thought about more ambitious charitable giving. They have spent years saving for retirement, educating their children, building wealth, without considering charitable giving in any larger way, even in connection with estate planning or leaving a legacy. We can help start the conversation.

MCF: Could you give an example of when you've been able to use some charitable planning vehicle to minimize the tax impact and even surprise a client with its benefits?

DR: A perfect example is the Charitable Remainder Trust. The CRT can solve a lot of problems all at once. It provides an income stream to the donor; it helps to diversify assets with a current tax cost; and it fulfills some great charitable intentions. Some clients may have heard of a CRT, but they don't realize that they can name multiple charities or that they can reserve the right to change the named charity. For a young donor, that right can be a very attractive and effective feature.

MCF: What are some of the questions you ask a client when he or she is weighing the difference between starting a private foundation and establishing a donor-advised fund?

DR: First and foremost, the amount of money they're thinking about is key to the question. Who will be involved, from a family perspective, is also important. Do they want to involve their children? Do they want to stay involved themselves? Will the giving be done over a number of years? They must also consider how the money will be managed and how projects will be evaluated.

MCF: What advice would you give your peers about how to approach a discussion of charitable giving with their clients?

DR: When a client is thinking about a large transaction such as selling a business or a building, the advisor should be at the front end of the discussion, before there's a purchase and sales agreement. There's a lot of planning that can be done around such a transaction that can lead to charitable giving. For the client, it boils down to the same benefits, but with fewer tax dollars going to the government and more dollars going to a charitable cause.

Charitable giving can take so many different forms. I think most people tend to think of it in terms of simply writing a check to a favorite charity. I feel as an advisor that I can help clients discover more interesting and powerful possibilities. Gifts of appreciated stock or life insurance policies, participation in a gift annuity, or the different types of vehicles, such as charitable remainder or lead trusts—there are so many possibilities that can provide benefits to the donor along with a charitable gift. I like to help my clients discover *what might be*.