


SPLC's wealth raises questions despite controversial activities

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The SPLC is biased — and extraordinarily wealthy

The Southern Poverty Law Center is perhaps most notorious for its “hate map,” which not only neglects to track extremist groups on the left, but also lumps mainstream conservative and religious organizations right alongside some of the most reprehensible neo-Nazis and white supremacists in the country.

For this, it has been regularly and rightly criticized.

The controversial activist group has also become phenomenally wealthy, with an endowment rivaling prominent universities and annual revenues exceeding some of the most well-known charities in the country.

Recent visitors to its website may have noticed the following fundraising appeal: “Urgent: This is an all-hands-on-deck moment. With so much at stake for American families, we need your help to stop the attacks on our most basic rights. Please rush your emergency donation today.”

Prospective donors who clicked on the prompt to “Give Now” were urged to make a one-time contribution of between \$35 and \$250, or a recurring monthly commitment of between \$15 and \$50.

The organization’s “urgent” pleas for an “emergency” cash infusion from small-dollar donors is puzzling, because the group literally appears to have more money than it knows what to do with. Its most recent Form 990 for the fiscal year ending in October 2024 disclosed an astonishing \$786.7 million in net assets, much of which is parked in public and private equity funds. Its three-quarters-of-a-billion-dollar endowment has more than doubled just since 2016.

For context, this makes the SPLC wealthier than many colleges and universities, including in the group’s home state of Alabama. Samford University, the largest private school in the state with over 6,000 enrolled students, reported just \$547.8 million total net assets in 2024.

Tuskegee University, which enrolled about 3,000 students, reported \$550.6 million in net assets that same year.

The SPLC's net assets are not too far behind those of the Auburn University Foundation, which had just over \$1 billion as of 2024.

Revenue is another method of measuring the SPLC's riches. As of August 2025, a ProPublica search for all 501(c)(3) charities located in Alabama placed the SPLC at No. 17 in most recent available annual revenue — behind ten hospitals/health care providers, two private universities (Samford and Tuskegee), two housing providers, one private foundation, and the SEC collegiate athletic conference.

The organization's total revenues in 2024 were \$129 million, mostly from contributions and grants. This was down from a record-breaking haul of \$169.8 million the year before. To put that number in perspective, the combined 2023 revenue of Alabama's eight regional food banks associated with Feeding America — which collectively serve the entire state — was \$183.6 million. In 2023, the SPLC brought in nearly \$48 million more than the United Way of Central Alabama.

Well-known nonprofits that brought in less money — as measured by total revenue—than the SPLC in 2023 include:

- The United Service Organizations (\$163.5 million)
- The YMCA of the USA (\$153 million)
- The Special Olympics (\$152.2 million)
- The National Park Foundation (\$151.5 million)
- The Central Park Conservancy (\$148 million)
- The Make-a-Wish Foundation of America (\$135.2 million)

Incredibly, the total 2023 revenues of the professional football, baseball and basketball halls of fame put together were just 35 percent of those of the SPLC. The famous Field Museum in Chicago, which welcomed more than 1.1 million visitors in 2023, had less than two-thirds the revenue of the SPLC. The National World War II Museum in New Orleans had less than half. The Georgia Aquarium — the largest in the country at over 11 million gallons of water — reported less revenue than the SPLC that year.

There is another important consideration to all of this as well. Like these groups, the SPLC is organized as a 501(c)(3) charity, incentivized by the American public with tax-exemption and the ability to accept tax-deductible contributions. Unlike them, its activities are highly controversial and divisive — two descriptors not generally associated with the word “charity.”

Of course, the SPLC is far from alone in making biased or spurious accusations of extremism. That is, regrettably, almost par for the course in our current overheated political environment. What truly sets the group apart is how phenomenally wealthy it has become in doing so. Even assuming a hypothetical online benefactor considering an “emergency donation” to the SPLC fully agrees with everything the group does, why should he or she lob a few more hard-earned dollars to the summit of its mountain of money?

If nothing else, there is a major opportunity cost involved — one those across the ideological spectrum can appreciate. How many cash-strapped nonprofits nationwide could use some of the hundreds of millions of dollars warehoused in the SPLC’s investment accounts to make a genuine positive difference in the lives of others? That is, after all, the ultimate purpose of charity.

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