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The Impact of Giving Together: Giving Circles' Influence on Members' Philanthropic and Civic Behaviors, Knowledge and Attitudes

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The page features a decorative graphic on the right side consisting of three overlapping circles of varying sizes, each with a dark blue center and a lighter blue outer ring. Two thin blue lines intersect at the top left and extend diagonally across the page, framing the circles.

The Impact of Giving Together

*Giving Circles' Influence on Members'
Philanthropic and Civic Behaviors,
Knowledge and Attitudes*

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With Hao Han, Melissa Brown, and Courtney Jensen

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Giving circles are made up of individuals who pool their resources and then decide together where these should be distributed. They also include social, educational, and engagement components that seem to engage participants in their communities and increase members' understanding of philanthropy and community issues.

This study examines if and how participation in a giving circle has changed members' **behavior** related to giving, volunteering, and civic engagement. In addition, we asked if and how participation in a giving circle has changed members' **awareness** or **knowledge** about philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and community issues. Finally, we wanted to know if and how participation in a giving circle has changed members' **perceptions** or **attitudes** about philanthropy, community issues, citizen, government and nonprofit roles and responsibilities or political and social values.

To address these areas, data were gathered through a **survey** of 341 current and past members of 26 giving circles of various types, sizes, and identity groups across the U.S., as well as a control group of 246 donors and public service graduate students and practitioners; semi-structured **interviews** with 30 giving circle members and past members from 11 giving circles; and **participant observation** in four giving circles.

Findings

Our findings indicate that:

1. Giving circles influence members to give more.
2. Giving circles influence members to give more strategically.
3. Giving circles members give to a wide array of organizations.
4. Giving circle members are highly engaged in the community.
5. Giving circles increase members' knowledge about philanthropy, nonprofits, and the community.
6. Giving circles have a mixed influence on members' attitudes about philanthropy, nonprofit and government roles, and political/social abilities and values.

Level of engagement, length of engagement, and size of the giving circle seem to matter most, when it comes to understanding giving circles' effects on members.

Giving Circles Influence Members to Give More

Giving circle members report that their participation in a giving circle caused them to increase their giving. While the survey shows that—when we control for income—the difference between giving circle members' giving and control group giving was not statistically different, self-reports and interviews suggest that giving circles did cause members to increase their giving. In addition, the more engaged and the longer someone is in a giving circle or the more giving circles to which a person belongs, the more a giving circle member appears to give in total annual contributions.

Giving circle members also give different amounts in relation to their participation in various activities of the giving circle. For example, members who mainly participate in deciding who receives funding give, on average, more in total household contributions than members who, for instance, mainly volunteer or attend social events or educational sessions through the giving circle. In addition, members who mainly attend social events give the largest percentage of their total giving through the giving circle, but those who mainly participate in funding decisions or who volunteer give the lowest percentage of their total household contributions through the giving circle.

Giving Circles Influence Members to Give More Strategically

Survey and interview data confirm that giving circle members are influenced to think more about their giving and giving plans (beyond the giving circle) as a result of giving circle participation. Giving circle members examine more intensely where, how much, and in what ways their charitable gifts should be made. Based on survey data, giving circle members are more likely than the control group to advance a vision for change, conduct research to help decide which organizations to support, support general operating expenses in addition to or instead of specific programs, check organizational performance data, and take into consideration cultural differences and race, class, and/or gender when making funding decisions. Many of these aspects of strategic giving are positively correlated with length of time and level of engagement in a giving circle, which means that the more a member is invested in and participating in a giving circle, the more their giving strategy is affected.

Conversely, giving circle members also appear to be giving to a larger number of organizations than the control group. In addition, in some interviews, members/past members explicitly indicated little or no change in their giving strategy due to participating in a giving circle. This seems to be explained by a relatively low level of engagement in the giving circle or a previously high level of engagement in philanthropy before joining a giving circle. In many of these cases, participation in a giving circle seemed to provide another outlet for the individual's existing philanthropic activities.

Giving Circles Members Give to a Wide Array of Organizations

The survey findings show that giving circle members are *more* likely than the control group to support women, ethnic and minority groups, and organizations that support or promote arts, culture, or ethnic awareness. Giving circle members are *less* likely to support federated or combined giving funds (such as the United Way) and religious organizations. The high degree of support for women and ethnic and minority groups is largely explained by the fact that giving circle member respondents were also more likely to be women or persons of color than control group respondents. However, findings also show that as length of time in a giving circle increases, *all* giving circle respondents are more likely to report giving to ethnic or minority groups.

Giving Circle Members are Highly Engaged in the Community

The findings from the survey show a positive correlation between being a giving circle member and being civically engaged. It is not possible to say if participating in a giving circle causes a higher level of civic engagement or if giving circles attract people who are already civically engaged. Interviews suggest many people join the giving circle having already done a good deal of volunteering. Yet, the data also show that the more engaged a member is within a giving circle, the more likely they are to say that they have increased the amount of time they volunteer. In addition, as length of time in the giving circle increases, the more members are likely to participate in the various activities of the giving circle and those with higher levels of engagement within a giving circle are more likely to say that they increased their level of community participation and their involvement in changing government policies. Length of time in a giving circle is also positively correlated with participation in other civic engagement activities.

Conversely, based on interviews, it appears that participation in a giving circle does not have a major effect on members' political activism for several reasons: many were already politically active before joining the giving circle, some see their work and volunteer activities as forms of political action, and some just do not see themselves as political activists generally. Nonetheless, several of those interviewed did seem to give greater thought to the relationship between what they learned through the giving circle and their political behaviors and indicated that their participation inspired them to talk more about political issues with their friends and family.

Giving Circles Increase Members' Knowledge about Philanthropy, Nonprofits, and the Community

Giving circles appear to give participants greater knowledge of philanthropy and a better understanding of which nonprofits are operating in their communities and internationally, as well as the issues these nonprofits face in serving their constituencies. They also appear to gain a greater awareness of community needs in terms of understanding the challenges facing nonprofit organizations and the personal, day-to-day struggles of individuals in need. Even for interviewees who said they came into their group with a heightened level of awareness of the issues and problems in the community, participation in a giving circle brought them greater breadth and depth of knowledge in these areas.

Giving Circles Have Mixed Influence on Members' Attitudes about Philanthropy, Nonprofit and Government Roles, and Political/Social Values

While a few interviewees noted that the giving circle had made philanthropy a more central focus in their lives or made them more thoughtful about the role of philanthropy in their lives, most said that they did not think their perception of philanthropy had changed much if at all. Furthermore, based on survey data, giving circle members and the control group did not differ significantly in their confidence or ability to make the community a better place to live or to influence public policy. The majority of giving circle members interviewed also said their attitudes about whether government or nonprofits should address social problems and their social values had not changed as a result of giving circle participation.

At the same time, the survey data also show that giving circle members were more likely than the control group to believe in the positive impact of giving on the health of a community, that government should do something to reduce income differences, and that government should ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living. However, the longer someone is in a giving circle or the larger the giving circle, the less members believe that giving and volunteering have a positive impact on the health of a community.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, we suggest the following:

Invest in Engaging and Keeping Members for the Long-Term

Since giving circles' impact increases with the level of engagement and length of member participation, giving circles and their hosts can focus energy on involving members in the giving circle's activities and keeping members involved over time.

Consider How a Giving Circle's Size May Affect Its Impact

The size of the giving circle has an important influence on members' behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions. Larger, more formal groups seem to increase members' use of formal giving strategies. Smaller and less formal circles seem to encourage diversification of giving and increased engagement. In general, smaller circles seem to have more positive impact on donors' civic engagement.

Don't Worry About Shifting Funding Away From Existing Priorities

A common concern about giving circles has been that they may divert funds away from causes and organizations already supported. This research shows that giving circle members tend to give more and give more broadly as a result of participation, rather than shift their giving. Giving circles may, however, displace giving that goes to combined charity campaigns such as the United Way.

Use Giving Circles to Increase Awareness about Community and Policy

Giving circles help donors to learn about community organizations, issues, and solutions and enhance the giving strategy of donors. They are just as or more important as tools for increasing this awareness, and enhancing giving strategy, as they may be for increasing giving. Giving circles and their hosts can be intentional about introducing members to proven organizations as well as those that are off the "beaten path."

INTRODUCTION

Giving circles are made up of individuals who pool their resources and then decide together where these resources should be distributed. They also include social, educational, and engagement aspects that seem to engage participants in their communities and increase their understanding of philanthropy and community issues.

This report presents data from a study to **understand the impacts of participating in giving circles on members' philanthropic and civic behavior, knowledge, and attitudes.**

Philanthropy is defined here as giving money and other resources, including time, to aid individuals, causes, and organizations. *Civic* describes areas related to government's roles and responsibilities, political and social values, and engagement in the community and political process. Beyond exploratory research to understand the overall giving circle landscape and motivations of members, and a number of case studies on specific types of giving circles, insufficient research has been done to understand giving circles' impacts on members.

This research is important for several reasons. Philanthropic institutions across the U.S. (and increasingly in other parts of the world) have helped to create and/or promote giving circles as a means for improving and increasing philanthropy and enhancing the communities in which they operate.¹ Community foundations and other “host” organizations devote staff and resources to start and support many giving circles with the assumption that the giving circle will allow them to cultivate new and more diverse donors, increase giving to their foundation and the community, and promote more informed, more strategic philanthropy. Yet, so far there has been little evidence, beyond the qualitative, to show that participation in giving circles has such impacts on members, in particular on non-white, non-female members. Second, while a few studies have provided insight into wealthy individuals' attitudes and behavior related to philanthropy,² we have less information about the behaviors, knowledge and attitudes of individuals of more modest means. Giving circle members seem to represent a cross-section of donors—beyond the mega-wealthy—and so can contribute to our understanding about donors from diverse backgrounds.

Finally, building on the work of theorists such as Robert Putnam, Sidney Verba, and others, studying the impacts of participating in giving circles may expand our knowledge about how practicing a more engaged and deliberative form of philanthropy—as often is the case with giving circles—might influence an individual's civic behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes. We can estimate the degree to which someone will give based on religiosity or political attitude (such as identification with a political party or liberal or conservative values),³ but we know less about how the act of participating in philanthropy and voluntary association, and increased awareness about problems in the community, might affect political/civic attitudes and behaviors.

¹ See for example: The Baltimore Giving Project, 2000; “Start a Giving Circle,” 2003

² See for example: Schervish, & Havens, 2001; Ostrower, 1995

³ See for example Brooks, 2003, 2006

We have heard much about the decline in participation among voluntary groups by Putnam and others; yet, earlier interviews with giving circle members indicate that (among other reasons) members are attracted to giving circles *because* they want to be more engaged in their communities.⁴ We can examine giving circles to see if these members are indeed more engaged and what the effects of this engagement might be on their civic perceptions. This area has not been addressed, but is of great importance as we increasingly look to philanthropy and its institutions to address community problems.⁵ Giving circles offer a unique opportunity to understand the nexus of philanthropy and voluntary association, and how education about philanthropy and the community might influence the attitudes and actions of citizens. Within this context, findings may be helpful to public service practitioners (in particular local government officials) who seek ways to build community cohesiveness and increase citizen involvement in decision-making processes and community problem solving.

The rest of the report is organized as follows. First, the literature review describes our current knowledge of the giving circle landscape and the gaps that remain in the literature. This is followed by a discussion of the research methodology. Primary data were gathered through a survey of members and past members of 26 giving circles of various types, sizes, and identities as well as a control group; semi-structured interviews with 30 giving circle members and past members from 11 giving circles; and participant observation notes from four giving circle members. Next, the findings and results of the study are reported. Finally, we close with a discussion and conclusions drawn from these findings.

⁴ Eikenberry, 2009.

⁵ Abramson, Salamon, & Russell, 2006; Eikenberry, 2007; Salamon, 1995.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GIVING CIRCLES

Scholars, practitioners, and journalists claim a new era has begun in American philanthropy—an era in which donors want to be more engaged through unconventional modes of giving and volunteering.⁶ This more engaged philanthropy has manifested in several ways, including the introduction of new funding mechanisms and philosophies to enable donors to reach their philanthropic goals.

Within this “new philanthropy” environment, giving circles have become popular among donors, especially non-traditional donors who are under the age of 50, women, and from various racial, ethnic and tribal groups.⁷ It is impossible to say how many giving circles exist in the United States (and increasingly abroad) because of their grassroots nature. Since the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers (Forum) began to track these groups in 2004, the number of giving circles identified has more than doubled to well over 500 groups. Most giving circles are relatively new, having started only in the last five to ten years and there is strong indication that many more exist and many more continue to be created.⁸ Giving circles are located in at least 44 states and the District of Columbia.⁹ Recent research by Bearman estimates that giving circles have given more than \$100 million over the course of their existence and have engaged at least 12,000 people.

Beyond exploratory studies done by Rutnik, Bearman, and Eikenberry, little broad-based research on giving circles exists beyond those on specific types of giving circles, case studies for use in the classroom, organizational evaluations, and reports or manuals for philanthropic practitioners to help promote and create giving circles.¹⁰ Rutnik and Bearman’s 2005 study, sponsored by the Forum, provided the first national scan of the giving circle landscape, locating approximately 200 giving circles in 39 states and the District of Columbia. The 77 giving circles represented in their survey sample engaged more than 5,700 donors and granted more than \$44 million over the course of their existence.

From this sample, as well as interviews with 15 giving circle lead contacts, Rutnik and Bearman concluded that giving circles attract a diverse array of donors—both men and women—across a wide spectrum of ages. The study suggested that giving circles typically start with a core individual or motivated group, and grow to include acquaintances from outside the founders’ immediate social network, thus maximizing informal social ties. Finally, the study documented the numerous critical decisions that giving circles make as they form, which determine their structure and operating procedure, their financial commitment, their funding priorities, and their

⁶ See for example: Byrne, 2002; Cobb, 2002; McCully, 2008; Streisand, 2001

⁷ Bearman, 2007; Lindsey, 2006

⁸ Rutnik and Bearman (2005, p. 5) estimate they were able to locate only one out of every two or three giving circles nationally.

⁹ Bearman, 2007. Giving circles have also been identified in Canada, Japan, South Africa and Great Britain.

¹⁰ Ahn, 2003; Beeson, 2006; Clohesy, 2004; Community Wealth Ventures, 2002; Ghosh, 2005; Guthrie, Preston, & Bernholz, 2003; Ho, 2008; Jovanovic, Carolone, & Massood, 2004; Kahn, 2007; Moody, 2008; Orloff, 2002; Rutnik & Beaudoin-Schwartz, 2003; Sbarbaro, 2002; Stanford, n.d.

administrative processes, including whether or not to form a relationship with a host organization.¹¹

Bearman's second study, sponsored by the Forum and published in 2007, identified more than 400 giving circles in 44 states and the District of Columbia. Detailed survey information was collected for 160 groups. The giving circles represented in this sample had raised nearly \$90 million over the course of their existence and had granted more than \$64 million. In 2006 alone, giving circles in this study reported that they gave \$13 million in grants to organizations in their communities, their regions, and internationally. When non-duplicative data from the 2005 study were added, giving circles were found to have raised more than \$95 million.

In addition, Bearman identified characteristics and practices of successful long-running giving circles (those that had operated for more than five years). These groups face common challenges, such as leadership transition and the difficulty of measuring their impact. They have survived by adapting their priorities and offerings, given more money over time and developed special programming for experienced members. Attributes such as strong leadership, a flexible structure, and positive relationships with host organizations were found to be critical to their sustainability.

Eikenberry's 2005 study sought to create a typology of giving circles and understand the degree to which they serve to democratize philanthropy. Data for this study were gathered from a database of 188 giving circles, interviews with 30 individuals from across the country participating in or working with a giving circle (including one case study of a giving circle where nearly all members were interviewed), and secondary data from published case studies, news articles, websites, and other documentation.¹² Three types of giving circles were identified: small groups, loose networks, and formal organizations (see Table 1).

Small Groups

Small groups consist of a small number of people who pool their resources and then decide together where to give these away. The amount of funds pooled by each member tends to be in equal amounts ranging from \$50 to \$5,000, though there are several small groups where the amount paid into the fund is left to the discretion of the individual. Because the group is small, leadership is often shared and all are able to participate in the decision-making process. About half of small group giving circles use a consensus decision-making process. The two major foci of small group giving circles seem to be social and educational activities, with the social aspects often taking precedence. The social aspect is emphasized through informal group interaction and discussions. The educational aspect is also relatively informal, taking place through the grant making process, site visits, meetings with nonprofit staff, and information sharing among group members. Several small groups have some staff support to help with administration or fiscal management.

An example of a small group is AsiaNextGen. It is a group of young professional Asian Americans seeking to address community needs and to engage in high impact philanthropy by

¹¹ Rutnik & Bearman, 2005

¹² Including the survey data from Rutnik and Bearman's 2005 study.

coming together and strategically funding issues of common interest in New York City. It started in 2004 with five friends who donated \$4,000 each, growing out of a networking event of young professionals in New York City who gathered at a reception sponsored by the Asian American Federation of New York. The Federation continues to host the giving circle. The stated goals of the group are to: impact social change, leverage monetary contributions, infuse expertise and skills with financial and intellectual capital, and educate and grow a new generation of philanthropists. Funding decisions and education about community issues are informed by guest speakers or workshops about philanthropy and issue areas, site visits to nonprofit organizations, group discussion, and connections to philanthropic networks.

Table 1: Giving Circle “Ideal” Types¹³

Type	Small Groups 41 identified (22% of all GCs)	Loose Networks 49 identified (26% of all GCs)	Formal Organizations 86 identified (46% of all GCs)
Number of Members	5 to 25 people, ave 13 people per group	2 to 140 people, number fluctuates	5 to 500 people, ave 84 people per group
Gender	Half women only groups; half mixed gender groups	Mostly women	Mostly mixed gender
Member Fee Per Year	\$50 to \$5,000 or discretionary	\$25 to \$35, discretionary	\$250 - \$5,700
Organizational Structure	Shared leadership, closed membership	Informal network, people come in and out with core group leading	Formal, committees, focus on growth
Grant Decision-Making	All participate, consensus and vote	Board or lead group, consensus	Committee (in some, members ratify), consensus and/or vote
Major Activities	Social and educational (mostly informal)	Social and fundraising (mostly informal)	Educational and volunteer engagement (mostly formal)
Affiliations	Community foundation or other organization serves as fiscal agent, sometimes provides staff support	National affiliation to headquarters or part of independent movement	Community foundation or other organization, several become independent 501(c)(3), many with staff support
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – AsiaNextGen – New Mountain Climbers – Shared Giving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bread for the Journey – Dining for Women – Party with Purpose – Womenade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Impact 100 – Latino Giving Circle of Chicago – Social Venture Partners Seattle

Loose Networks

Loose networks typically consist of a core group of people who do the ongoing organizing, planning and grant decision-making for the group and then individuals, who may or may not be considered members, branch off from that group, often participating intermittently. “Members” tend to gather around a specific event like a potluck dinner or other fundraiser. Individual participants can make funding recommendations but typically do not make funding decisions. There is little or no staff support within these groups. Rather, loose networks are characterized

¹³ Eikenberry, 2005

by their flexibility, organic nature, low cost to operate and lack of bureaucracy. There is typically no minimum fee to participate and decision-making often occurs in an ad hoc fashion in response to the needs of individuals. The activities of these groups are primarily social, with less emphasis put on educating members about the community. Many see their participation in the group as an alternative to volunteering.

An example of a loose network is Womenade. The first Womenade was created in Washington, D.C. when Dr. Amy Kossoff and her friends decided to hold a potluck dinner and ask attendees to donate \$35 to a fund that would enable Kossoff to give financial assistance to her clients for prescriptions, utility bills, and rent. Kossoff did much of her work in homeless shelters and public clinics and regularly provided assistance to her clients out of her own pocket. The women called the group Womenade and held their first potluck in March 2001. Nearly 100 women attended, raising \$3,000. A year-and-a-half later, *Real Simple* magazine did a story on Washington Womenade, including a section on “How to Start a Womenade,” and the idea spread (Korelitz, 2002). At least 25 Womenade groups have been identified. This article also inspired Marsha Wallace to start Dining for Women, now a national network of more than 177 small groups across the country in which women meet for dinner on a monthly basis and pool the funds they would have spent eating out to support international grassroots programs helping women around the world.

Formal Organizations

Formal organizations are more formal in their structure and decision-making processes, looking very much like a traditional membership organization structure with a board or lead group at the top, committees, members, and frequently professional staff support. They are also larger in size of membership than other giving circles and the cost to participate tends to be high compared to small groups and loose networks; the modal amount being \$5,000 and \$5,500. The grant decision-making process typically involves committees or investment teams making grant decisions directly or making recommendations for a full membership vote. The major activities of formal organizations are education and engagement. Most formal organizations have some kind of educational programming in addition to grant making and other informal educational opportunities. There is also a strong emphasis on direct engagement with nonprofit organizations. About half of formal organizations provide opportunities for members to volunteer with nonprofit organizations. In most cases, members volunteer their expertise at the administrative level rather than through direct service.

Social Venture Partners (SVP) provides an example of a formal organization. SVP started in 1997 in Seattle and now has expanded to at least 25 SVP-type giving circles in the U.S. and Canada. The group follows a philanthropic philosophy that emphasizes long-term relationships with funding recipients, the provision of seed capital and organizational advice, and close tracking of funding recipients’ progress and effectiveness. Its major foci are educating members about philanthropy and community issues and creating long-term, engaged relationships with funding recipients. The annual contribution to SVP is around \$5,000. SVP also asks members to volunteer at the nonprofit agencies they fund, providing consulting and capacity building support. SVP affiliates fund in various areas but often take a strong interest in issues related to youth and education.

Others findings from Eikenberry's study indicate that giving circles generally bring younger and more female participants to the philanthropic table that are either long-time philanthropists or those new to organized philanthropy. For both groups, participation seems to increase levels of giving while bringing "new money" to the nonprofit sector; especially to small and locally-based organizations. Members also seem to learn about and give to organizations and individuals, and in interest areas, they most likely would not have given to otherwise. In addition, members seem to be more thoughtful, focused and strategic in their personal giving because of educational experiences in the giving circle. Eikenberry concludes that compared with more traditional philanthropic mechanisms, giving circles seem to be "something different": compared to individual check writing, giving circles offer a more engaged, personal experience, and compared to foundation giving, they enable individuals of less wealthy means to actively participate in organized philanthropy at a more significant level.

Missing from these and other studies on giving circles is a more definitive and broader understanding of their impacts on members' philanthropic and civic behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes. The studies that have been completed to date provide only exploratory evidence about how members' philanthropy has been affected and have not sought to obtain information from a control group of individuals not engaged in giving circles. This study strives to illuminate changes in *how much* individuals give, *how* they give, and how they *think* about their giving.

We know even less about the impact of giving circles on members' civic knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Giving circles seem to build the capacities of citizens to participate in community (much in the way Tocqueville saw voluntary associations), and enable members to connect with others in the community and identify with individuals in need.¹⁴ Still, it is unclear what the impact of participation in giving circles has been on members' knowledge of and attitudes about government's roles and responsibilities and their own political and social values, and to what degree their participation translates into increased or changed civic action. This was not a focus in earlier studies but is important to understand given the current political environment where citizens seem increasingly disinterested in civic participation as it has traditionally been understood, and in which philanthropy and voluntary association are viewed as appropriate means for solving collective problems.¹⁵

Because of the newness of this area and giving circles' dynamic, grassroots features, the studies on giving circles to date have been largely exploratory. This study aims to broaden and deepen our knowledge about the impacts of participating in giving circles on members' philanthropic and civic behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes. To this end, questions addressed include:

1. Has participation in a giving circle changed members' *behavior* related to giving, volunteering, and civic engagement?
2. Has participation in a giving circle changed members' *knowledge* or *awareness* about philanthropy, nonprofits and community issues?

¹⁴ Schervish and his colleagues, 1988 and 2001, have shown this to be an important factor in philanthropic commitment.

¹⁵ Eikenberry, 2009.

3. Has participation in a giving circle changed members' *attitudes* or *perceptions* about philanthropy, community issues, political and social values, and government or nonprofit roles and responsibilities?

The next section of the report describes the research methodology used to address these questions.

METHODOLOGY

The study gathered data primarily through a survey and semi-structured interviews with giving circle members and past members, triangulated with participant observations.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The first step in the data-gathering process was to identify a sample of giving circles on which we could focus for surveying and interviewing. Choosing a sample of giving circles for more in-depth analysis was the best strategy because giving circles are somewhat reclusive by nature and often protective of their members, as evidenced by past research on giving circles. Indeed, as we progressed through this study, we found again how difficult it was to “reach” members of even our sample giving circles (see limitations section below).

Table 2: Characteristics of Sample Giving Circles

Key Characteristic	# GCs in Sample	# Individuals in Sample
Type of Giving Circle		
Small Group	14	104
Loose Network	4	35
Formal Organization	8	227
Identity Group Focus ¹⁶		
Women	17	213
African-American	2	13
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	10
Latino	1	29
Young Professional	5	60

We used a sample of 26 giving circles, drawn from an updated version of the Forum’s giving circle database, consisting of giving circles that represent various types and sizes (i.e. small groups, loose networks, formal organizations) and identity groups (e.g. women-only, African-American-only, young professionals) in order to get a broad cross-section of data (see Table 2).¹⁷ The giving circles in our sample also represented a range in terms of years of existence and geographic locations.¹⁸ In choosing this sample, we also took into consideration earlier studies that have been published on particular giving circles.¹⁹

¹⁶ The numbers here add up to more than 26 because some groups combined more than one identity affiliation, such as an African American Women’s giving circle.

¹⁷ We asked 37 giving circles to participate in the study but 11 of these did not participate for various reasons.

¹⁸ Giving circles in the sample ranged from a year or less in operations to the oldest group starting in 2001. They were located in California (2), Idaho, Illinois (3), Indiana, Michigan, Missouri (3), Nebraska, New Jersey, New York (3), North Carolina (2), Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Virginia (2), Washington, and the District of Columbia (2).

¹⁹ For instance, Social Venture Partners has already done extensive research on its membership and so a good deal of data is available on this giving circle model. We also thought it was important to try to include more diverse groups beyond those examined in earlier studies (mainly white, women’s groups).

Survey

A survey was constructed (see Appendix) and sent to giving circle members and past members of the giving circles in the sample described above, as well as to a control group of donors and public service graduate students and practitioners who were likely not in a giving circle. We created paper and web-based versions that were administered between November 2007 and April 2008.²⁰ We estimate that we sent surveys to 890 giving circle members/past members²¹ and 938 individuals in the control group—a total of 1,828 people. The total number of responses was 587 after outliers were removed: 331 giving circle members and 256 control group respondents (10 past giving circle members were counted in this group).²² There were also a number of individuals who refused to take the survey. The overall response rate is estimated to be 37 percent. The response rate for giving circle members is estimated to be 48 percent (38 percent if refusals are not counted as responses). Giving circle members/past members were recruited by the principle investigators through giving circle leadership in each giving circle in the sample.²³ The control group included a random sample of donors to a Midwestern university and a non-random sample of public administration graduate students and alumni from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The response rate for these groups was 23 percent (28 percent [120 responses] for university donors and 20 percent [94 responses] for UNO graduate students/alumni).

The characteristics of survey respondents are shown in Table 3. Overall, giving circle members in the sample were more likely to be female, from more diverse racial/ethnic groups, and older on average compared to the control group. The proportion of women giving circle member respondents was 82.8 percent compared to 59.7 percent for the control group. This difference is statistically significant. Giving circle member respondents also included people of more diverse racial/ethnic identities (28%) than the control group, which was 87 percent white. This is most likely because giving circles of diverse racial and ethnic groups were targeted for inclusion in the study. In addition, the average age for giving circle members was 48.4 compared to 42.3 for the control group and this difference was statistically significant. The likelihood of joining a giving circle appears to increase as age increases based on this sample.²⁴ Among all of the respondents, 10.6 percent were less than or equal to 30 years old; 74.4 percent are between 30 and 60 years old, and 14.9 percent are over 60 years old.

²⁰ Except for one question that was accidentally dropped from the web-based version of the survey, questions in both formats were identical.

²¹ This number is based on what was reported to us by the lead member of each group, who distributed the surveys for us.

²² Outliers are the data from respondents whose donation is beyond three standard deviations of the sample mean.

²³ When we first contacted the lead person at each giving circle, we asked them to advise us on the best way to reach members and past members of the group. We offered to: come to a meeting and distribute paper surveys, send paper surveys or the electronic survey link to the lead contact who would then distribute these to members/past members, or mail surveys/email survey link directly to members/past members (with contact information provided by the lead contact). In all cases but one, the lead contact wanted us to mail/email the survey to them and then they forwarded to members/past members. One lead contact wanted us to attend a meeting but scheduling did not work out for us to attend so we ended up mailing/emailing the survey to the lead contact to distribute.

²⁴ With a correlation value of 0.236 significant at a 1% confidence level.

On average, giving circle members attended religious services less frequently than the control group and the difference is statistically different. This may be because the social activity dimension provided by giving circles could, to some degree, substitute for religious activity or people who are not interested in religious activity may be more likely to participate in a giving circle. Indeed, one of the giving circle members we interviewed said: “I don’t think anybody in the group goes to church or has any real religious affiliation and I think this [the giving circle] is the answer to that” (#10A).²⁵ Regarding political orientation, giving circle members are more likely to describe themselves as liberal or middle-of-the-road compared to the control group.

Table 3: Characteristics of Survey Respondents (Outliers Excluded)

Description	Control Group (n=256)	GC Members (n=331)	t	p-value
Female	153	274	-6.67	0.000*
White	222	238	3.73	0.000*
Age	42.3	48.4	-4.92	0.000*
Religious Attendance ²⁶	2.22	1.91	2.38	0.017*
Education Level ²⁷	2.47	2.49	-0.34	0.733
Years in Current Community	19.2	17.3	1.42	0.156
Political Orientation ²⁸	4.12	4.99	6.46	0.000*
Annual Income	\$90,000	\$106,500	-3.09	0.002*
Annual Giving	\$4,945	\$7,682	-2.52	0.006*

*Statistically significant difference

Finally, there is a large difference between giving circle members and the control group in the amount they say their households donated to charity over the past year. The mean for giving circle members was \$7,682 compared to \$4,945 for the control group. This difference is statistically significant. However, the average annual family income of giving circle members was also higher than the control group: around \$106,500 compared to around \$90,000, and this difference is also statistically significant. There is no significant difference between giving circle members and the control group for educational level, years living in current community, marital status,²⁹ and number of children.³⁰

²⁵ There were 30 members or past members of 11 giving circles of various types, sizes and identity groups interviewed for the study. Interviews were coded 1 through 11 to show membership in one of the 11 giving circles in the sample and A through D to track different people in the same giving circle. Thus, the code for 10A here means that the first person interviewed from giving circle number 10 is quoted.

²⁶ The ranking for religious attendance was coded as: 0 = Do not attend, 1= Once a year or less, 2 = Several times a year, 3 = At least once a month, 4 = Once a week or more.

²⁷ Education level was coded as 0 = High school, 1 = Vocational school, some college, or associate’s degree, 2 = Bachelor’s degree, 3 = Master’s or advanced degree.

²⁸ We ranked the possible answers from the respondents reporting their political orientation from 7 to 1 in the following order: extremely liberal (7), liberal, slightly liberal, middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, and extremely conservative (1).

²⁹ t = 0.03, p = 0.972

³⁰ t = 1.06, p = 0.289

Looking specifically at giving circle members, the average donation amount by female members was larger (\$8,127.30) than for male members (\$7,021.80), although the difference was not statistically significant.³¹ However, there is very little difference between female and male giving circle members in their reported annual family incomes. This indicates that female giving circle members are giving more than male giving circle members and this is not due to different incomes. In addition, female giving circle members' average age (49.5) is higher than the average age of the total sample (46.1) and the average age of male giving circle members (44.2). The differences are statistically significant.

For giving circle members of color, the average annual total donation amount (\$5,277.30) is lower than the average for all giving circle members (\$7,681.60), but there is not a statistically significant difference. There is also no significant difference between giving circle members of color and all giving circle members for total annual family income. This indicates that members of color are giving less than the giving circle membership as a whole and this is not related to income. In addition, the average age of giving circle members of color (44.3) is lower than the average age of all members (46.1), but the difference is not statistically significant.

Finally, it is worth noting that the larger giving circles in our sample tended to have a larger percentage of white members in the group. However, the differences between small, medium, and large groups were not significantly different.³² Average age, total donation amount, and family income were also higher in larger groups.³³

Interviews

We conducted 30 interviews with a purposively selected sample of members and past members from 11 giving circles in our original sample. We chose the groups from which the interviewees were members or past members to get a representative group and because the lead contact was willing to help us contact members/past members. We interviewed giving circle members/past members with varying levels of involvement in the group, length of membership, gender and gender orientation, profession, and racial/ethnic identities. They were also members of different types of giving circles (see Table 4 for a summary of interview participants' key characteristics). Interviews were conducted on the telephone by both primary investigators, recorded, and transcribed. They took place between December 26, 2007 and May 23, 2008 and ranged from 22 minutes to 55 minutes, with the average length 36 minutes.

Transcriptions were independently analyzed by one primary investigator and a graduate assistant. MAX QDA qualitative data analysis software was used to systematically organize, code, and analyze the data. Analysis followed a strategy set out by Maxwell that involved an iterative

³¹ p-value = 0.532

³² p-value = 0.48

³³ The average age is 47.6 and 47.3 for members in giving circles of small and middle size and 47.6 for giving circles of large size. The average total donation amount is \$6,563.90 for members in small giving circles, \$7,065.30 for medium sized giving circles, and \$13,104.80 for members in large giving circles. The average family income is \$90,500 and \$97,700 for members in small and medium size giving circles, and \$135,000 for members in large giving circles.

process of contextualizing and categorizing strategies.³⁴ This process included: listening to the entire interview and reading transcripts and other documents completely through to get a sense of the whole, re-reading and coding segments, re-coding and grouping codes into broad clusters of similar topics or nodes, primarily around the research questions though allowing for emergent topics. These clusters were then iteratively re-coded into more specific and simplified nodes, creating “trees.”³⁵

Table 4: The Characteristics of Giving Circle Members/Past Members Interviewed

Key Characteristic	Number in Sample
Level of Involvement	
Leader/Active Member	4
Committee Member	11
Regular Member	9
Mainly Donor	4
Past-Member	2
Length of Membership	
5+ Years	5
3-4 Years	13
2 Years	7
1 Year or Less	5
Gender	
Male	7
Female	23
Profession	
Government	1
Nonprofit/Fundraising	8
Foundation	5
For-profit	10
Retired/None	6
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	4
Latino/Hispanic	4
Asian/Asian American	8
White	10
Unknown	4
Type of Giving Circle	
Small Group	9
Loose Network	2
Formal Organization	19

Participant Observations

Participant observations were used to supplement survey and interview data. Four individuals conducted participant observations in three giving circles from May 2007 to April 2008. Participant observers were asked to keep a journal of reflective notes (using an observation protocol provided by the principal investigators) during this time period. Entries were sent to one of the primary investigators after each meeting. Participant observers also submitted meeting

³⁴ Maxwell, 1998, p. 90.

³⁵ Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29

minutes and other relevant documents from the group. These were included in the analysis process described above for interviewing and used mainly to supplement and triangulate our findings. We ultimately found these reflections to be less useful as we had hoped, and perhaps most revealing about what did not happen at giving circle meetings rather than what did happen.

Study Limitations

Even though the primary investigators have been working with and been members of giving circles for some time, reaching and getting giving circle members to participate in the study was not as easy as we had anticipated. This may be because giving circles are largely grassroots in nature, led by volunteers, and frequently protective of members. We set out in this study to get a broad as well as less-studied cross-section of giving circles to participate. We were fairly successful in reaching various types of giving circles and identity groups, but we would have liked to include more men, African American and Latino/Hispanic groups, and loose networks in the sample. Strong and sustained efforts were made to include these groups but proved unsuccessful for various reasons. Fewer of these groups make up the giving circle population to begin with. In addition, because the primary investigators are both white females, we may not have been able to connect as easily with some groups. Loose networks are much less bureaucratic in nature and looser in their structure so a bit more difficult to reach. We also had hoped to include at least one Social Venture Partners group in the sample but were not able to do so due to changes in leadership in one group we approached and because SVP International was in the midst of other studies at the time of our research (see Moody, 2008).

As for the survey, our initial intent was to get a random sample of two different donor groups: donors to higher education and donors to a widely supported human services agency operating on a national level. Due to transitions at the human services agency, agreement there was never reached and in spring 2008, an alternative convenience sample of University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) School of Public Administration graduate students and alumni were contacted.³⁶ The response rate from the Indiana University random sample of 120 respondents does not itself provide sufficient numbers for comparison with giving circle data except on the largest levels. The UNO convenience sample boosts the responses available for analysis but it is also not large enough on its own to provide detailed comparison with giving circle responses. Thus, it is difficult to draw generalizable conclusions about national donors from the control group. However, having a convenience sample to compare with the convenience sample of the giving circle members with the same questions asked in the same period of time does give a legitimate framework for examining how giving circle members might differ from the larger population.

We also ran into a few glitches with our web survey that ultimately could not be fixed by the company that hosted the online survey. There were several people who tried to take the survey but ran into a question (#4) that would not allow them to enter the data and move onto the next question. Some of the people who contacted us about this problem ended up taking the web survey through other means or completing a paper survey. We do not know how many others, if any, did not contact us if they ran into difficulties. We do know, however, that out of 613

³⁶ We also contacted three different community foundations but they were not willing to participate in the study.

attempts to complete the survey, 165 (27 percent) were abandoned before completion. Because there were no unique identifiers for each respondent, we have no way to know if some people retried and then completed the survey later. Nor do we know how many of the 165 were repeated attempts by the same person or people to take the survey.

There were also some limitations to our interview sample. We did not have the time to interview members/past members of every giving circle in our sample so had to choose only some members and past members from our sample to interview. We did our best to choose a representative sample but it is difficult to know how well our interview sample represents the larger population. This potential limitation is offset somewhat by triangulating our findings from this study with past studies. We especially set out to interview people who were not included in earlier studies and for the most part, we were successful. We had good representation, for example, from various racial/ethnic groups and men. We found that it was difficult to find and secure interviews with past members of giving circles, and were only able to include two in our sample. We had also planned to interview as many people as possible in person rather than over the telephone, but found once we started the study that it was logistically not possible (and also that telephone interviews were preferable for their ease and flexibility). The people we did interview were, for the most part, very busy and so some of the interviews had to be shortened to accommodate schedules.

Finally, our participant observers were chosen mostly for convenience based on the observers' willingness to take notes on a regular basis during the study's timeframe. There was no attempt to try to find a representative sample of giving circles for this data gathering process, though it did turn out that the three giving circles observed were at different stages in their lifecycles: one having just started, one two years old, and one more than four years old. These observations are supplemented with our own experiences being members of giving circles.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this research is to understand the impacts of participating in giving circles on members’ philanthropy and civic life. In particular, we want to know if participation in a giving circle has changed members’ *behavior* related to their giving, volunteering, civic engagement and political action. We also want to know if participation in a giving circle has changed members’ *awareness* or *knowledge* about philanthropy, nonprofits, and community issues. Finally, and much more difficult to determine, we want to know if participation in a giving circle has changed members’ *perceptions* or *attitudes* about philanthropy, community issues, citizen, government and nonprofit roles and responsibilities, or their political and social values. Each of these areas is addressed in detail below.

Philanthropic and Civic Behaviors

This section looks at the impacts of participation in a giving circle on members’ giving—total household contributions, giving strategies, and where people give—as well as on their volunteering, civic engagement and political actions.

Giving

Total Annual Giving

People in giving circles tend to donate more on an annual basis than people who are not in giving circles. Survey data show that there is a large difference in the amount of annual charitable household giving between giving circle members and control group respondents. The mean for giving circle members is \$7,681.68, compared to \$4,944.50 for the control group and this difference is statistically significant.³⁷ However, the average annual family income of giving circle members is also higher than the control group: around \$106,500 compared to around \$90,000.³⁸

Table 5: Income Range and Average Household Contributions during the Past Year

Income Range	GC Member Annual Donations (mean \$)	Control Group Annual Donations (mean \$)	t	p-value
\$25,000-\$35,000	1,250	1,055	-0.39	0.697
\$35,000-\$50,000	932	3,447	1.34	0.187
\$50,000-\$75,000	1,761	2,345	0.88	0.378
\$75,000-\$100,000	2,905	3,825	1.10	0.273
\$100,000-\$150,000	5,890	5,457	-0.20	0.837
\$150,000-\$200,000	7,029	7,129	0.03	0.971
\$200,000 above	19,744	12,428	-1.40	0.153

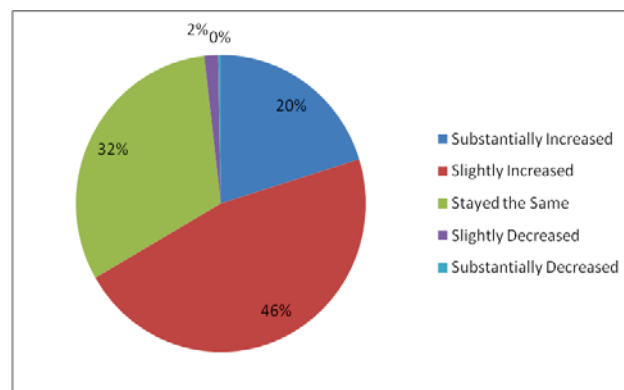
³⁷ t = -2.52, Pr [T < t] = 0.006, Pr [|T| > |t|] = 0.012

³⁸ t = -3.09, p = 0.002

Looking at annual giving by family income, we tested whether there is any difference in total charitable donations between the giving circle and the control group (see Table 5). We found no statistically significant difference for average household contributions between these two groups when accounting for family income. Thus, it appears that the average annual contribution amount is larger for giving circle members because giving circles have more high-income participants. This means that people with higher annual family incomes are more likely to join a giving circle and they are not necessarily donating more.

Conversely, based on self-reports (Q. #11a in the survey), 66 percent of giving circle members indicated that the total amount they contribute each year has increased due to giving circle participation, while 32 percent indicated their donation amounts have stayed the same (see Figure 1).³⁹ The inconclusiveness of the survey data may indicate that the increased amount given is not big enough to make a statistically significant difference, respondents are exaggerating the impact of the giving circle on their giving, or respondents gave less before and are now more like the control group.

Figure 1: Giving Circle Members Change in Annual Household Contributions



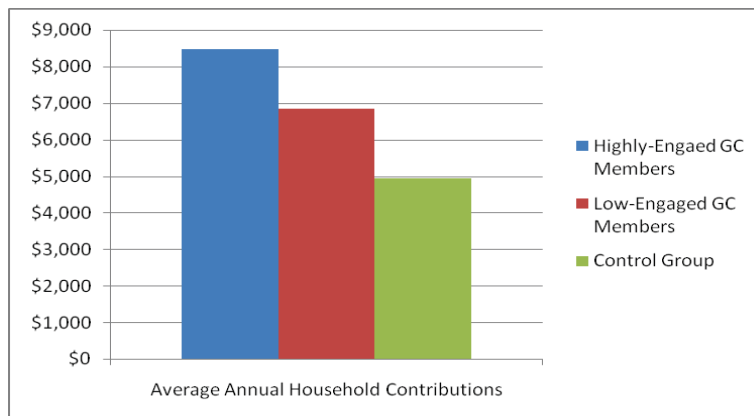
In addition, at least one-third of those interviewed specifically said their personal giving has increased since joining a giving circle (#1A, 3A, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 7C, 8B, 8D, 10B). Several respondents also said their giving amount has remained the same or they have shifted their giving from elsewhere to the giving circle (#4C, 2B, 9C, 10C). Two people also reported a decrease in giving due to retirement and job loss since joining the giving circle (#7B, 8A).

We can further examine the effect of giving circle participation on members' total giving by looking at the various levels and ways in which giving circle members are engaged with the giving circle and how these correlate with total giving. Based on survey data (Q. #10), it appears

³⁹ SVPI also found recently that 72% of respondents to their study of SVP partners indicated their total annual giving increased since joining SVP (Kahn, 2007). Half of respondents cited SVP as one of the top two reasons, along with community involvement, as to the reason their giving increased. More recently, Moody (2008) found in a survey of a broad sample of 175 members of 14 SVP affiliates that over 70% of respondents said their charitable giving to all causes increased after joining SVP. A third of these said their giving rose by 50% or more after joining SVP. Over half of these respondents indicated that SVP was a significant or primary factor in influencing this change.

that higher levels of engagement in the giving circle are associated with higher amounts contributed through the giving circle;⁴⁰ however, giving circle engagement does not significantly correlate with increases in annual total amount contributed.⁴¹ That is, the more giving circle members are engaged in the group, the more they give through the giving circle, but this does not necessarily translate into more overall giving.⁴² For all giving circle member respondents, 27 percent of their annual household contributions were done through a giving circle.⁴³

Figure 2: Level of Engagement in Giving Circle and Average Annual Household Contributions



Yet, if engagement level in the giving circle is divided into two levels—low level (2.5 and under) and high level (2.5 and above)—members’ total annual household contributions do increase from one level to the next (see Figure 2).⁴⁴ In other words, if someone is highly engaged in the giving circle, they are more likely than less engaged members to give more in total contributions. Highly-engaged members give a lot more than the control group too. The mean for annual household contributions increased from \$4,945 for the control group to \$6,852 for low-engagement members to \$8,476 for high-engagement members.

⁴⁰ The correlation coefficient is 0.203, with p-value 0.00. An index for the engagement level was created by dividing the total maximum possible scores for each of the questions by the number of applicable entries; the index ranged from 1 to 4.

⁴¹ The correlation coefficient is 0.038, with a p-value = 0.490.

⁴² It might also be noted that for female giving circle members, the engagement level in the giving circle does not have a statistically significant correlation with total amount donated while it does have a statistically significant correlation with the amount donated through the giving circle. This means that female giving circle members do not appear to increase their total annual giving due to giving circle participation; however, they do donate more through the giving circle when they are more connected to the giving circle. For giving circle members of color, the two correlations are not statistically significant.

⁴³ 13% of respondents reported that more than half of their annual household contributions are done through a giving circle. For female members, 25.5% of their total giving is done through a giving circle. For giving circle members of color, 22.4% of their total giving is done through a giving circle. There are no statistically significant differences.

⁴⁴ The index for the engagement level in the giving circle was created by dividing the total maximum possible scores for each of the 10 engagement activities by the number of applicable entries, with the index ranging from 1 to 4. These engagement levels were then divided into higher- and lower-level, using 2.5 as a cut-off point. The median (50%) falls at 2.5. The possible answer for each ranged from 0-4 (0 = Does not apply, 1 = Not at all, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently).

The conclusion to be drawn from these data are that giving circle members who are highly engaged in the circle may be influenced to give more overall while less engaged members are less likely to change their level of giving.⁴⁵ It could also be that people prone to be highly engaged in a group like a giving circle are also prone to give more. Interviews and previous studies suggest that individuals who were not highly involved in philanthropy before joining a giving circle (#6A) may indeed be influenced to give more as their participation level in the group increases.⁴⁶ However, for those already very active in philanthropy, being very active in the giving circle does not seem to have as much of an effect on their giving amount (#8A, 4C, 10C).

Data in Table 6 also show that annual total household contributions increase as the length of time in the giving circle increases.⁴⁷ Even if we preclude the income effect, we find that total annual donations increase as length of time in a giving circle increases.⁴⁸ This data suggest, then, that given enough time, giving circles do influence members to give more. Because most giving circles are still fairly new (most have started in the last 5-8 years), it may be too early to tell the true effects of participating in giving circles on members' giving.

Table 6: Length of Time in Giving Circle and Annual Average Household Contributions

Length of Time in Giving Circle	Total (#)	Annual Total Giving (mean \$)
All giving circle members	331	7,682
Less than one year	93	3,682
One to two years	98	7,687
Three or four years	100	9,531
More than five years	40	12,328

Another way to attempt to understand effect over time is to look at giving circle members in more than one giving circle. In the sample, 40 people were in more than one giving circle. People in more than one giving circle tend to donate substantially more than other people, with an average of \$13,400 compared to \$6,834 for members in one giving circle and \$4,945 for people in no giving circle. The number of giving circle memberships has a statistically significant and positive effect on giving.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Moody (2008) also found in a survey of SVP members “that the least involved partners—those who reported no other SVP activities beyond giving an annual contribution—were the least likely to say SVP had some sort of impact on their giving” (p. 30).

⁴⁶ See also Eikenberry, 2009.

⁴⁷ The correlation coefficient between total donation amount and length of time in the giving circles is 0.186, which is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

⁴⁸ The average family income for giving circle members with a length of membership less than one year is 6.02, so we treat it as \$100,000. The average family income for giving circle members with length of membership 1-2 years/3-4years/more than 5 years are respectively 7.45/7.59/7.69. Using an F-test, we find there is no statistical significance among these three at the 95% confidence level, so we treat the average household revenue of giving circle members with time length larger than one year as the same: \$170,000.

⁴⁹ We employed two ways to check the correlation between membership in multiple giving circles and total household contributions. The correlation between number of giving circle memberships and the total amount given is 0.205, significant at the 99 percent confidence level (p-value = 0.0002). In addition, by doing a tobit regression

Finally, it is interesting to note that giving circle members who engage in the giving circle in different ways behave differently in relation to their charitable giving (see Table 7 and Figure 3); these differences are not statistically different. For example, the most generous giving circle members are those mainly deciding on whom or which organizations receive funding from the giving circle. These giving circle members' average annual household giving is \$11,055 and 26.4 percent of their total giving is done through a giving circle. (As indicated above, the average percentage of giving done through the giving circle for all giving circle member respondents was 27 percent.) They also make up the second highest income group. This suggests that the people who are making funding decisions in the giving circle are also active philanthropists outside of the giving circle. It could be that the experience of learning about and deciding on funding recipients inspires members to want to give more to the organizations they encounter beyond the giving circle. Interviews from this and earlier studies do suggest that members frequently give to potential nonprofit funding recipients beyond what is given through the giving circle (#2A, 7B, 8C, 9A, 10B).⁵⁰ As one interviewee put it:

I have been exposed to a lot of smaller groups particularly because I've been on the grant making committee since I've been a member of [Giving Circle] and as I've seen some of the reports that come in, or the application forms, and anything that I've felt, that struck my interest, I would pursue on my own, later after the giving circle's donation. (#2A)

Table 7: Main Activities in the Giving Circle and Annual Average Giving and Income

Mainly Attended/Participated In Activities Through the Giving Circle ⁵¹	Average Total Giving	% of giving thru GC	Average Annual Income
Voted or took part in deciding who received funding	\$11,055	26.40%	\$118,750
Helped raise funds	\$10,410	28.50%	\$116,500
Held leadership position(s)	\$9,583	30.00%	\$112,750
Went on site visits	\$9,571	28.50%	\$126,250
Participated in committee meetings	\$8,466	30.50%	\$107,750
Volunteered with funding recipient or other nonprofit	\$8,178	26.60%	\$102,750
Attend full membership meetings	\$8,036	30.50%	\$99,500
Attended social events	\$7,943	31.60%	\$99,750
Took action on local, national, or international policy issue(s)	\$7,722	28.60%	\$98,000
Attended educational sessions	\$7,642	29.50%	\$108,750

and putting the total giving amount as the dependent variable, we found that the number of giving circle memberships is the next significant variable right after the total family income and the constant: the number of giving circle memberships has a statistically significant and positive effect on giving at the 95 percent confidence level (p-value = 0.021).

⁵⁰ See also Eikenberry, 2008, 2009.

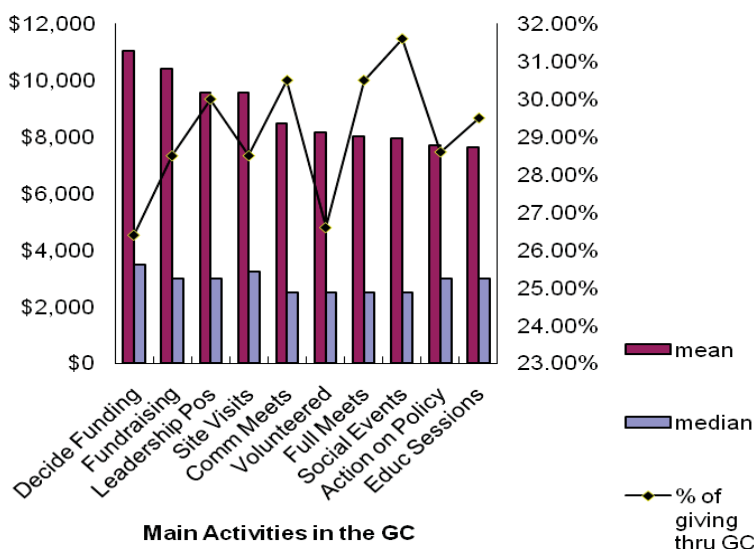
⁵¹ People reporting that they frequently do one of these activities are more likely to report that they frequently do other activities as well.

Similarly, those who do fundraising for the giving circle also give a relatively high amount in total annual contributions (\$10,410) and about one-fourth of this total annual giving is done through the giving circle. Presumably, those who help raise funds through the giving circle are highly committed to the giving circle’s activities and processes.

Giving circle members mainly holding leadership positions and attending site visits give the next highest amounts. The average annual household giving for those mainly holding leadership positions is \$9,583 and 30 percent of their total giving is done through the giving circle.

For those mainly attending site visits, total annual giving is \$9,571 and 28.5 percent of this giving is done through the giving circle. However, this second group of donors also has the highest average family income (\$126,250) of all giving circle members. This suggests that the people conducting giving circle site visits tend to be those with higher incomes. Earlier studies suggest that site visits are often conducted as part of the grant making process and this is done as a group (in the case of small groups) or a committee (as in the case of loose networks and formal organizations). This process is typically open to anyone who wants to and has the time to serve. Thus, it may be that people with higher incomes have more time and resources to devote to the grantmaking and site visit process.

Figure 3: Ways of Engaging in Giving Circles and Annual Average Household Contributions



Those who mainly volunteered with a funding recipient or other nonprofit through the giving circle indicated in the survey that they donated a total of \$8,178 on average annually with 26.6 percent of their giving done through a giving circle. This group gives one of the lowest percentages (except for members mainly deciding on funding recipients) of their total annual giving through the giving circle. This may be because people who are volunteering through the giving circle are also very active and giving elsewhere.

Members who mainly attend committee and full membership meetings fall mid-range in average amount donated in the past year (\$8,466 and \$8,036 respectively), and both groups give about

one-third of their total annual giving (30.5 percent) through the giving circle. This may mean that those mainly attending meetings are more involved in the administration of the giving circle and thus also more dedicated to giving through the group.

Members who report that they frequently attend social events of the giving circle have an average annual household contribution amount of \$7,943, and 31.6 percent of their total giving is done through the a giving circle (this percentage is the highest for all activity groups). This group also has one of the lowest average annual incomes among members. Thus, giving circle members who mainly attend social activities through the giving circle give the highest percentage of their total annual giving through a giving circle but a lower average total donation amount compared to members mainly participating in other activities. This may mean that members attending social events are not giving as much elsewhere and so may be shifting their giving to the giving circle or they may have not been as active in giving before and the giving circle is providing an outlet for them to be more active.

Giving circle members who mainly took action on policy issues gave lower overall amounts in total giving (\$7,722) and a relatively low percentage of their giving through the giving circle. This may be because giving circles generally do not take action on policy issues and so provide little inspiration to people who may be more interested in giving money in this area.⁵² Interviews for this study (see below) and earlier research suggest a low level of political/policy activity in giving circles.⁵³ The low level of giving may also be because this group has the lowest annual income compared to those who mainly focus on other activities.

Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, the average amount of annual household contributions for members who mainly attend educational sessions (\$7,642) is *less* than the average total amount of giving for giving circle members who mainly participate in all other activities, though it is still larger than average annual total giving for the control group (\$4,945). This may mean that giving circle members mainly attending educational sessions are learning about the giving side of philanthropy and using the giving circle as a tool for their initial foray into giving. Interviews from earlier studies have suggested that many, especially younger giving circle participants, are new to the giving side of philanthropy.⁵⁴ The low average amount given compared to other groups, however, could also indicate that donor educational sessions alone do not inspire more giving.⁵⁵

Based on this data related to engagement in various activities in the giving circle, we cannot conclude definitively that certain activities lead to more giving. However, the differences do suggest that certain giving circle activities either attract certain kinds of people (who give more or less annually) or that certain activities do have some influence on the amount people

⁵² As some evidence of this, in one of the participant observation giving circles, several people decided not to renew their membership in 2008 because they were giving more money to MoveOn.org and the Obama campaign.

⁵³ Eikenberry, 2009.

⁵⁴ Eikenberry, 2009.

⁵⁵ SVPI also found in a recent study of their members that serving on a grant committee, volunteering with investees and meeting other Partners were cited as SVP activities with the greatest impact on partner giving. Attending donor education seminars had the least impact (see Kahn, 2007).

contribute through the giving circle and overall.⁵⁶ This suggests that social events, as well as informal and formal experiential learning opportunities, might be important in influencing changes in members’ giving.

Finally, it is critical to note that as giving circle size increases, total annual household giving by members also increases.⁵⁷ Since there is no statistical evidence of a relationship between the family income of members and the size of the giving circle, we can preclude the income effect and conclude that the total donation amount does increase as the size of the giving circle increases.

Giving Strategy

The way that giving circle members are giving appears to be deeply influenced by giving circle participation. In the survey, we asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they consider various strategic aspects when making larger charitable contribution (see Table 8 and Figure 3). These have been identified in the literature as important indicators of strategic giving.⁵⁸

Table 8: Strategic Giving Indicators for Control Group and Giving Circle Respondents

Strategic Giving Indicator	Control Group	GC Members	t	p-value
Advance a vision for change	2.544	2.942	-5.067	0.000*
Conduct research to help decide on which organizations to support	1.992	2.267	-3.497	0.001*
Soliciting input from and/or collaborating with others to make funding decisions	1.490	2.112	-9.066	0.000*
Support general operating expenses in addition to or instead of specific programs	2.208	2.310	-1.236	0.217
Check organizational performance data	1.661	1.972	-4.208	0.000*
Make multi-year gifts	1.714	1.744	-0.389	0.697
Take into consideration cultural differences and race, class, and/or gender	1.541	2.216	-8.311	0.000*

*Statistically significant difference

Giving circle members are more likely than the control group to advance a vision for change, conduct research to help decide on which organizations to support, support general operating expenses in addition to or instead of specific programs, check organizational performance data, and take into consideration cultural differences and race, class, and/or gender when making funding decisions. Giving circle members are also more likely than the control group to make

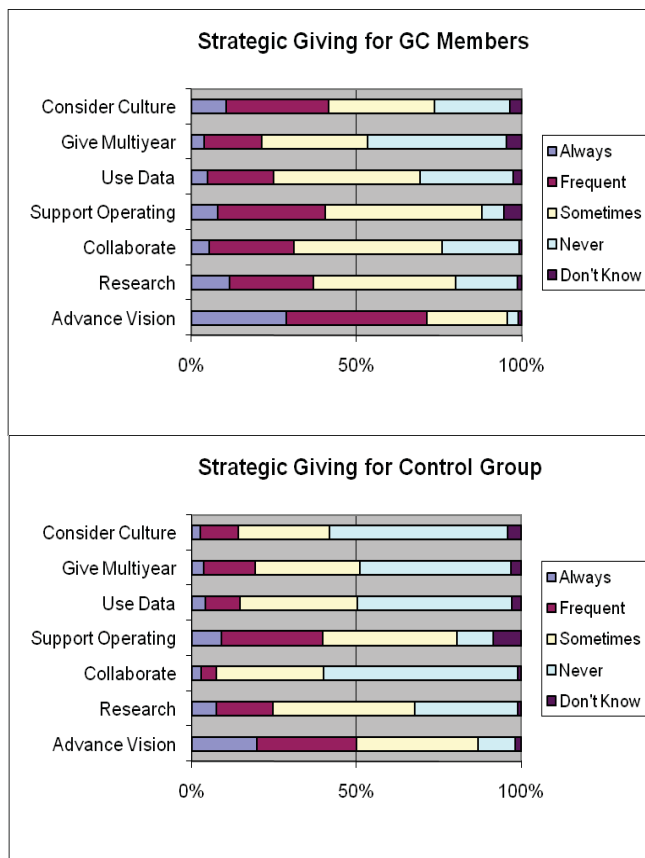
⁵⁶ A survey by Moody (2008) of 175 members of 14 SVP affiliates found that “partners who felt SVP had an impact on changing how much they gave point to four primary components of SVP involvement as most important: meeting other partners, volunteering with an investee, attending donor education seminar or events, and serving on a grant/investment committee” (p. 13).

⁵⁷ The correlation coefficient between total donation amount and size of the giving circles is 0.108, which is (barely) statistically insignificant at the 95 percent confidence level; $p = 0.0501$.

⁵⁸ Strategic giving indicators were created largely following the work of SVP International (see Kahn, 2007). The degree of strategic giving for each indicator was coded as: 4 = Always, 3 = Frequently, 2 = Sometimes, 1 = Never, 0 = Don’t Know.

multi-year gifts. The statistical significances of these indicators are large except for multi-year giving and support for general operating expenses, which are not significantly different from the control group.⁵⁹

Figure 3: Strategic Giving Frequency for Giving Circle Members and Control Group



Over half of the giving circle members and past members we interviewed also indicated that participation in a giving circle had some notable effects on how, where, and what they give. These included:

- Discovering the need to plan for giving (#10A, 10B).

⁵⁹ SVPI's recent survey of their members found that respondents substantially increased their use of formal processes in grant making and collaborative practices since joining SVP. Three-fourths of respondents also indicated that SVP played some, a significant, or a primary role in changes in their giving strategies. Serving on a grant committee, meeting other partners and serving on an internal SVP committee or board were cited as activities with the most influence on giving strategies (Kahn, 2007). Moody (2008) also found that every characteristic of strategic philanthropy for which he measured showed an increase for members since joining SVP. Among those for whom changes occurred in how they give (86.3%), nearly 60% said that involvement in SVP was a significant or the primary factor influencing their giving strategies. Serving on the grant/investment committee and volunteering were most cited as having the greatest impact on changing how Partners give. It also appears that the members in SVP the longest were most affected in this area.

- Giving in a more educated fashion (#6A).
- Being “intentional and deliberate” in giving (#1B).
- Giving more in line with personal interests (#2B) such as supporting organizations with which the member was already involved as a volunteer (#8B).
- Not responding to “random appeals” (#4A) or giving blindly (#3B).
- Questioning a gift’s impact (#10C) including considering the relationship between gift size and impact (#7D) and giving more focused, repeat, targeted gifts as opposed to sporadic donations across many organizations (#9B).
- Thinking “deeply about operating cash versus endowment...and when it’s the right time to give to an endowment” (#8D).
- Conducting more research and due diligence on nonprofit organizations (#3A, 2A, 9B, 11A) , including:
 - Looking more closely at organizations and how funding is being used (#10A).
 - Being “much more critical of the organization” receiving donations (#9A).
 - Being “picky” about who to give to (#4C).
 - Deciphering “worthy (requests), and....not so worthy [requests]” (#4D).
 - Comparing organizations to one another (#7A, 9A, 10A, 11A) and differentiating organizations through delivered results (#1C).
 - Communicating desired impact with organizations (#4A).
- Considering best practices, change-agent projects, and power relations (#1A).
- Considering philanthropic funding in ethnic communities (#3B; 4A, 8A, 8D).

Based on interviews, participating in a giving circle seems to cause members to not only think more about their giving and giving plans, but also to examine more intensely where, how much, and in what ways their gifts should be made. It also appears that participation may influence members to give more thought to their own impact and the ability of funded organizations to create desired social change. These findings align with earlier studies.⁶⁰

Correlations between amount of giving and the strategic behavior of giving circle members is less straight-forward (see Table 9). Survey data indicate that as the amount given *through* a giving circle increases, the respondent is more likely to report conducting research to help decide on which organizations to support, supporting general operating expenses, checking organizational performance data, and making multi-year gifts. These are all statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Given the findings above that show that the longer and more engaged someone is in a giving circle, the more they give, we might surmise that all of these factors combine to influence giving circle members to be more invested in their giving and more willing to support organizations in a more careful but open and long-term fashion.

Alternatively, when looking at total household contributions (not just giving through the giving circle), only two strategic indicators—advancing a vision for change and soliciting input from and/or collaborating with others to make funding decisions—were significantly changed (see Table 9). Other dimensions of strategic giving did not correlate with statistical significance for reported changes in total amount given. We might conclude from this data that with an increase

⁶⁰ Eikenberry, 2009; Guthrie, Preston, & Bernholz, 2003; Kahn, 2007; Moody, 2008.

in strategic giving in these two areas, total giving also increases. This positive correlation may be because the substitution effect is offset by the income effect. That is, instead of people who are more strategic donating less as a result, it may be that people who give more tend to put more emphasis on strategic giving strategies when making funding decisions. Interestingly, the total amount given has a *negative* correlation with multi-year giving and giving for general operating expenses, though these are not statistically significant.

Table 9: Strategic Giving Indicators and Members' Giving, Length of Membership and Level of Engagement

Giving Strategy	Annual Giving Thru GC	p-value	Total Annual Giving	p-value	Length of Time in GC	p-value	Level of Engagement in GC	p-value
Advance a vision for change	-0.039	0.478	0.1393	0.012*	0.051	0.356	0.051	0.355
Conduct research to help decide on which organizations to support	0.174	0.002*	0.0928	0.097	0.132	0.018*	0.132	0.018*
Soliciting input from and/or collaborating with others to make funding decisions	0.063	0.261	0.1201	0.032*	0.240	0.0000*	0.24	0.0000*
Support general operating expenses in addition to or instead of specific programs	0.231	0.000*	-0.0553	0.324	0.127	0.023*	0.127	0.023*
Check organizational performance data	0.203	0.000*	0.0216	0.700	0.166	0.003*	0.166	0.003*
Make multi-year gifts	0.237	0.000*	-0.0496	0.381	0.151	0.007*	0.151	0.007*
Take into consideration cultural differences and race, class, and/or gender	0.108	0.052	0.0641	0.253	0.256	0.0000*	0.256	0.0000*

*Statistically significant difference

All the indices of strategic giving behavior also correlate positively with a members' length of time in a giving circle and, except for advancing a vision for change, are all statistically significant (see Table 9). Perhaps this one area was not significant because the more a person invests through the giving circle, the more the vision for change is that of the giving circle rather than that of the individual member. More data would be needed to evaluate whether these changes in strategic giving are associated more strongly with the length of time in the giving circle or with the amount donated to the giving circle. People in more than one giving circle are also more likely than others to collaborate on decision-making for giving, examine performance data, and consider culture when making gifts. There is no statistically significant difference, though, on motivation for change between people in one giving circle and people in more than one giving circle.

Higher levels of engagement in the giving circle are also positively and significantly correlated with all of the strategic behaviors except advancing a vision for change, which is not significant (see Table 9). We cannot say, however, whether level of engagement in a giving circle causes these preferences or whether these preferences influence the level of engagement in a giving circle and the respondents' commitment to the processes of the giving circle. In either case, it is safe to say that being in the giving circle enables members to think about and implement more strategic giving. This is confirmed by a point that came up several times in the interviews:

regularity of meetings and the actual act of getting together to talk about giving makes members think more about their own giving (#5A, 6A, 9B).

Political orientation is also positively correlated with all strategic giving indicators and statistically significant for most of these (see Table 10). Specifically, the more liberal the giving circle members, the more strategic their giving behaviors.

All strategic giving behaviors also correlate positively with giving circle size and most are statistically significant (see Table 10). This means that the larger the giving circle, the more likely members are to put into practice each of the strategic indicators. This may be because larger, more formal giving circles often put more emphasis, through donor engagement and grant making practices, on strategic giving.

Table 10: Strategic Giving Indicators, Political Orientation and Size of Giving Circle

Giving Strategy	Correlation w/ Members' Political Orientation	Correlation w/ Size of GC
Advance a vision for change	0.320*	0.065
Conduct research to help decide on which organizations to support	0.062	0.134*
Soliciting input from and/or collaborating with others to make funding decisions	0.131*	0.240*
Support general operating expenses in addition to or instead of specific programs	0.136*	0.128*
Check organizational performance data	0.068	0.167*
Make multi-year gifts	0.026	0.151*
Take into consideration cultural differences and race, class, and/or gender	0.240*	0.265*

*Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

Giving circle members give to a larger number of organizations than the control group. In the survey, members report giving to an average of 10 charities while control group respondents give to an average of 8 charities. This difference is statistically significant, even when accounting for total giving and income.⁶¹ Members with higher levels of engagement in a giving circle were also more likely to say that they increased the number of charities they support. One possible reason for this may be that the giving circle can provide or expose members to information about more organizations and thus members feel comfortable about funding more organizations. Indeed, in interviews members and past members said that being in a giving circle introduced them to new organizations to which to contribute (#4B, 4C, 3A, 5B, 7A, 7B, 8B, 9A, 9B, 9C, 10C). However only a few stated they had actually made donations to these organizations (#2B,

⁶¹ The difference is significant for family incomes between \$25,000 - \$34,999 and \$150,000 - \$199,999 at the 5% level, and \$10,000 - \$14,999 and \$200,000 or more at the at 10% level. The result cannot be compared for the \$15,000 to \$24,999 income range group because not enough information was available. As for controlling for giving range, the difference on the number of organizations is significant for those who made total donations of less than \$600 or more than \$10,000. For those who made total donations of \$10,000 or more, the mean number of organizations supported was 20 for giving circle members and 15 for control group respondents.

7A, 8C, 9A). A few interviewees reported making donations to “different kinds of organizations” (#8C) and giving directly to an organization as opposed to giving blanket donations (#7A), but most responded that they were still giving to the same organizations that they supported prior to participating in the giving circle.

The responses of the interviewees and the survey data indicate that giving circle participants seem to be diversifying their giving. Much like volunteering (see below), giving circle participation seems to enhance or provide a new outlet for previous giving practices. In addition, while a number of the interviewees noted a desire to have a “more hands-on, and closer, connection with the, community grass-roots organizations” (#1B), or “feel a little closer and a little more connected” (#1C) to the organization than larger foundations or the United Way, which “almost feel impersonal” (#4A), several interviewees still remained involved with organizations they had funded before the giving circle, either through donations or volunteering. Individuals continued engagement with what appear to be larger organizations (despite their positivity about their more hands-on experience through the giving circle and raised awareness of local organizations) may be due to a belief in these organizations’ efficacy or engrained habit. It also may show that “engaged giving” means different thing to different people.

Survey data also indicate that as the size of the giving circle increases there is a *positive* but not statistically significant correlation with the total number of organizations supported. That is, as the size of the giving circle increases, the number of organizations funded increases for giving circle members. This contradicts findings from a recent study of SVP partners—which tend to be larger, more formal groups—that found 69 percent of respondents to their survey are making fewer but larger investments with their personal giving.

It should be noted that several of our interviewees explicitly indicated little or no change in their giving strategy (#1A, 1C, 5A, 7C, 8A, 11B). Among this group, one person noted that the reason she started her giving circle—an affiliate of a national network of giving circles called Dining for Women—was to *not* have to personally be strategic about giving because the organization did the research and vetting for the affiliates. Other respondents were already very active philanthropically and had already sorted out their own giving strategies. As one interviewee explained, “I think I was so far gone down that road” already (#1A). Some members noted that their “strategy” was already to follow their passion (#1A, 5B, 7B) and/or give to organizations with which they are engaged or people with whom they already have a relationship (#2A, 4B, 4C, 3B, 8B, 10B). And some interviewees were simply not very engaged in the giving circle.

Areas Supported

Given the impact of giving circle participation on giving strategy, it is also relevant to examine how members have been affected in the areas they support with their giving. On the survey (Q. #2), we asked respondents to indicate the areas/groups to which they made contributions during the past 12 months (see Figure 4 and Table 11). Survey data show that giving circle members are more likely to give to organizations that support women, ethnic and minority groups, and arts, culture or ethnic awareness than the control group respondents.

Figure 4: Areas Supported by (Non-GC) Control Group and Giving Circle Members

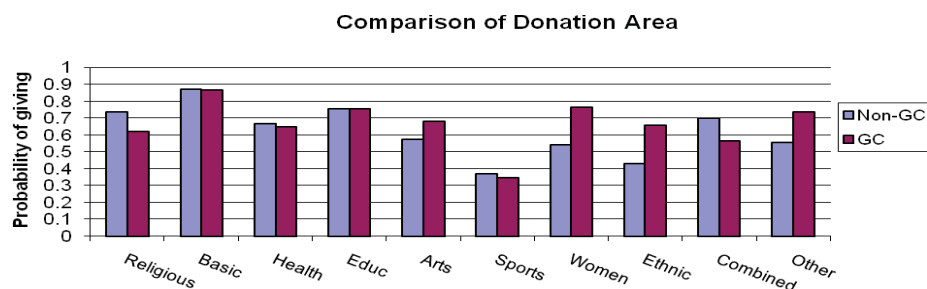


Table 11: Percent of Control Group and Giving Circle Members that Support Each Area

	Religious Purposes ⁶²	Basic Needs	Health Care	Edu- cation	Arts	Sports & Rec	Women & Girls	Ethnic/ Minority	Combined Funds	Other ⁶³
Control Group	74%	87%	67%	75%	57%	37%	54%	43%	70%	55%
GC Members	62%	86%	65%	76%	68%	34%	76%	66%	57%	73%

Giving circle members were also more likely to donate to “other” areas, such as the environment, neighborhood development, advocacy, and international aid. Differences in the probability of making donations to causes such as people in need of basic necessities, sports and recreation, education and health care/medical research were small and statistically insignificant.

Giving circle members were statistically *less* likely than the control group to give for combined purpose funds and for religious purposes or spiritual development. This suggests that the giving circle itself is seen as a replacement for more traditional combined purpose organizations such as United Way, United Jewish Appeal, Catholic Charities, and religious affiliations. As noted earlier, demographic information about survey respondents show that giving circle members are less likely than the control group to attend religious services. There is almost no statistically significant difference between people in more than one giving circle and people in just one giving circle regarding giving area.

Some of these data may be explained by the fact that giving circle member respondents are also more likely to be women or from communities of color than are the control group respondents. Indeed, the data show that female giving circle members are more likely to give to women and girls with a proportion of 81 percent, compared to 52 percent for male giving circle members; the difference is quite significant (see Figure 5).⁶⁴ There is also a statistically significant difference between whites and other racial/ethnic groups regarding donations to women and girls. Giving circle members of color are much *less* likely to donate to women and girls with a probability of

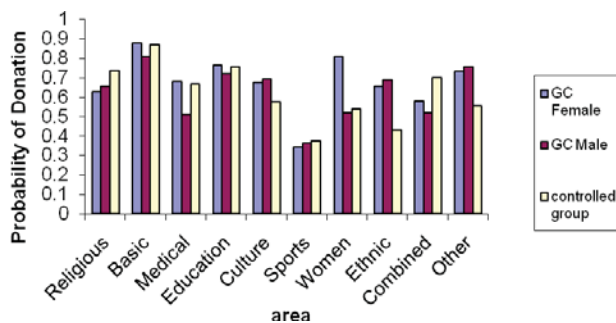
⁶² These numbers are the average donation probability. When people donate to religious organizations, for example, they are coded religious as 1, otherwise 0. Then the average is computed. For example, 0.74 means 74% of respondents donate for religious purpose.

⁶³ The “Other” category includes: environment, neighborhood development, advocacy, and international aid.

⁶⁴ The difference between men and women regarding donations to the area of women and girls is $t=-4.6$ and $p=0.000$.

63 percent, compared to 79.5 percent for white giving circle members. The probability of male giving circle members giving to ethnic or minority groups is 68 percent, compared to 65 percent for female giving circle members.⁶⁵

Figure 5: Areas Supported by Gender



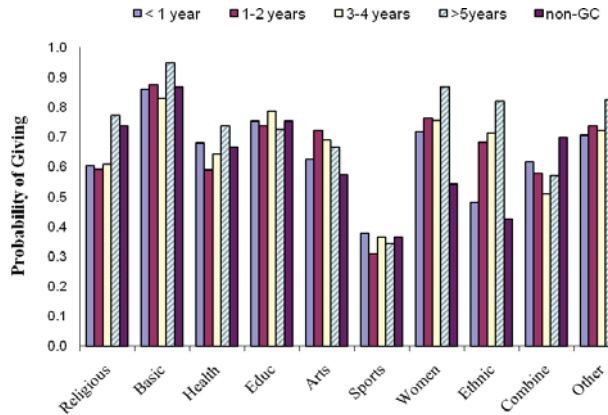
Giving by members of racial/ethnic-focused groups is also more concentrated on supporting ethnic or minority groups (almost all of these giving circle members donate to this area). In addition, giving circle members of color are less likely to give to combined funds, and this difference is significant at the 99 percent confidence level. That is, the probability of white giving circle members giving to combined funds is 61 percent compared to 40 percent for giving circle members of color. This follows trends in general giving, which shows that more whites than blacks give for combined purposes.⁶⁶

As length of time in a giving circle increases, respondents appear more likely to report giving for religious purposes, to basic needs, and to organizations that support women, ethnic or minority groups, and other areas (see Figure 6). In the case of giving to organizations that support ethnic and minority groups, the increase is especially pronounced for people who are not members of giving circles that are explicitly non-white and racially/ethnically-focused. One reason for this phenomenon may be that people tend to take cultural differences and race issues more into account when participating in a giving circle for a longer period of time (as was found to be the case related to strategic giving in general, discussed above). Another possible reason may come from the biased sample. To clarify this matter, we did a pairwise correlation between whether a donation was made to an ethnic or minority group and length of time in a giving circle, controlling for giving circle members who are in a racially/ethnically-focused giving circle. The correlation is still positive for non-white racial/ethnic giving circles, but no longer significant at the 95 percent confidence level. However, the correlation is positive and significant at the 95 percent confidence level for other giving circles. This indeed indicates that white giving circle members do support more ethnic and minority groups as their length of time in a giving circle increases when we hold for ethnic/racial group membership. This is tempered only by the additional finding that as the size of the giving circle increases, the donation amount to ethnic and minority groups decreases accordingly and is statistically significant.

⁶⁵ The difference is not significant: $t = 0.45$, $p = 0.65$

⁶⁶ Brown & Rooney, 2008

Figure 6: Areas Supported by Giving Circle Members and Length of Membership in Giving Circles



Volunteering, Civic Engagement, and Political Action

Volunteering and Civic Engagement

The findings from the survey suggest an overall positive correlation between being a giving circle member and being civically-engaged. Based on survey data, we created an index to show degree of civic engagement based on a number of civic engagement activities in which people might participate (there were a total of 14 activities, see Q. #12 in the survey).⁶⁷ The index average for giving circle members was 8.8 compared with 7.3 for the control group. This difference is quite statistically significant. However, when controlling for income, this difference became less significant (see Table 12). That is, only certain income groups show a statistically significant difference in civic engagement. Among respondents with an income of \$25,000 to \$34,999 and \$50,000 to \$149,999, giving circle members were more civically engaged than control group respondents. For the rest of the respondents, the difference in civic engagement levels between giving circle members and the control group was not statistically different. Thus, we can conclude that there is an overall positive correlation between being a giving circle member and the likelihood of being civically engaged, but this correlation is only significant for certain income groups.

Table 12: Income and Level of Civic Engagement for Giving Circle Members and Control Group

⁶⁷ Civic engagement indicators were created based on the index used by CIRCLE: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: http://www.civicyouth.org/practitioners/Core_Indicators_Page.htm#1. These include: working with others to solve a problem in the community; volunteering; belonging to a group or association; donating money; voting; talking to others about an election or campaign; contacting public officials; contacting a media outlet to express an opinion on a social or political issue; protest, march or demonstrate; sign a petition about a social or political issue; and either buy something or not buy something because of the social or political values of a company.

Income Range	Average Level of Civic Engagement GC Members	Average Level of Civic Engagement Control Group	t	p-value
All Respondents	8.8	7.3	5.78	0.000*
Less than \$10,000	NA	6		NA
\$10,000 - \$14,999	7	7.33	0.1222	0.908
\$15,000 to \$24,999	NA	9		NA
\$25,000 - \$34,999	9.5	5.84	-2.859	0.01*
\$35,000 - \$49,000	7.76	6.76	-0.817	0.419
\$50,000 - \$74,999	9.29	7.64	-2.457	0.016*
\$75,000 - \$99,999	9	7.28	-2.815	0.006*
\$100,000 - \$149,999	8.7	7.46	-2.400	0.017*
\$150,000 - \$199,999	9.12	8.04	-1.431	0.158
\$200,000 or More	8.75	7.68	-1.595	0.114

*Statistically significant difference

Female giving circle members were no more likely to be civically-engaged than male giving circle members and members of color did not differ in their level of civic engagement compared with white giving circle members.

It is not possible to say definitively if participating in a giving circle *causes* a higher level of civic engagement or if giving circles attract people who are already highly engaged. In the survey, 46 percent of giving circle members report that participation in a giving circle increased the amount of time they volunteer while 50.6 percent reported no change and 3.4 percent said it decreased because of the giving circle (see Figure 7).⁶⁸ Among respondents who said their volunteer time increased, those with higher levels of engagement in the giving circle were more likely to say that they increased the amount of time they volunteer. That is, members' total time volunteering increased with their level of engagement in the giving circle.⁶⁹ The correlation between engagement level within a giving circle and broader civic engagement level is 0.2505, which is quite significant at the 95 percent confidence level.⁷⁰ This is very strong level of significance, meaning there is very little probability that we would get a different result if we did the study repeatedly. Thus it is safe to conclude that the level of engagement in the giving circle has a positive correlation with people's general civic engagement.⁷¹

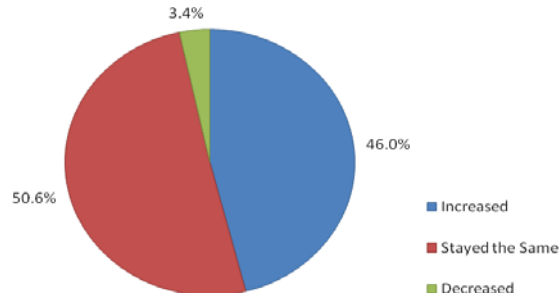
Figure 7: Participation in Giving Circle's Effect on Volunteer Time

⁶⁸ SVPI also found in their survey of Partners that 63% of respondents noted an increase in their volunteerism after joining SVP (Kahn, 2007). More recently, Moody (2008) found through a survey of 175 members of 14 SVP affiliates that 68% said their volunteering increased after joining SVP and over half of these respondents indicated that SVP was a significant or primary factor in influencing this change.

⁶⁹ With a correlation value of 0.360, p-value = 0.000.

⁷⁰ p = 0.0000.

⁷¹ SVPI also found in their survey of partners that 70% of respondents indicated SVP had some, significant, or a primary impact on their community involvement (Kahn, 2007).



We do not know the *causal* relationship between participation in a giving circle and civic engagement. It is possible that more civically-engaged people tend to join the circle, but it is also possible that participation in a giving circle increases people’s level of civic engagement. At least half of the interviewees said that when they joined giving circles, they already had a long history of volunteering and engagement, dating back to high school and through pro-bono neighborhood work, volunteering with the United Way, a church, or elsewhere (#1C, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4D, 5B, 6A, 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, 9B, 9C, 11A, 11B). These comments may indicate that for many, giving circle participation is a continuation of previously established engagement habits, not a spur toward new or increased engagement.

Table 13: Length of Giving Circle Membership and Level of Engagement in Giving Circle

Time Length in GC	Engage Level in the GC
Less than 1 year	2.257
One to two years	2.469
Three or four years	2.840
Five years or more	3.003

Yet, the survey also shows that length of time in a giving circle is positively correlated with the index of civic engagement (see Table 13)⁷²—a relatively low, but significant, correlation. This lends some support to the hypothesis that giving circles promote higher levels of civic engagement. This is further supported by the data that show that people in more than one giving circle score very high on the civic engagement index compared to people in only one giving circle or in no giving circle. Taken on its own, then, the direction of causation is not clear: people who are highly civically engaged may be more motivated to join more giving circles than people with a lower score. However, viewed in combination with length of time in a giving circle or membership in more than one giving circle, people may actually increase their civic engagement levels because of their giving circle participation.

Likewise, the correlation between length of time in a giving circle and the engagement level within a giving circle is positive and significant (see Table 13).⁷³ As time in the giving circle increases, members are more likely to participate in the various activities of the giving circle (see

⁷² $t = 0.03, p < .05$

⁷³ $t = 0.3316, p\text{-value} = 0.000$. Engagement indicators were coded as: 4 = Frequently, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Not at All.

Table 14). There are positive correlations between length of time in a giving circle and participating in committee meetings, holding a leadership position, attending educational sessions, helping raise funds, going on site visits, attending social events, voting to make decision, volunteering with funding recipients, and taking action on the policy issues. These results are all statistically significant. Attending full membership meetings is also correlated positively with length of membership, but is not statistically significant.

Table 14: Engagement in Giving Circle Activities and Length of Membership

GC Engagement Activities	Correlation with Length of Membership	p-value
Attended full membership meetings	0.076	0.176
Participated in committee meetings	0.244	0.000*
Held leadership position(s)	0.341	0.000*
Attended educational sessions	0.155	0.008*
Helped raise funds	0.397	0.000*
Went on site visits	0.230	0.000*
Attended social events	0.220	0.000*
Took part in deciding who received funding	0.412	0.000*
Volunteered with funding recipient or other nonprofit	0.238	0.000*
Took action on policy issue	0.165	0.005*

*Statistically significant difference

Those with higher levels of engagement in a giving circle are more likely to say that they increased their participation in efforts to address problems in the community (Q. #11e)⁷⁴ and their involvement in changing government policies (Q. #11g).⁷⁵ Both of these are statistically significant. From this, we can conclude that the level of engagement in a giving circle has a positive correlation with people’s civic behaviors.⁷⁶

When we break these data down demographically, we find a statistically significant positive correlation for female giving circle members between engagement level in the giving circle and five aspects of civic engagement: Amount of change in volunteering time, participation in efforts to address community problems, knowledge of nonprofit organizations, knowledge of community issues, and involvement in changing government policies.

For giving circle members of color, there is no obvious correlation between engagement level in the giving circle and efforts to address community problems or involvement in changing government policies. However, there is a statistically significant positive correlation between engagement level in the giving circle and amount of change in time devoted to volunteering.

⁷⁴ With a correlation of 0.251.

⁷⁵ With a correlation of 0.281.

⁷⁶ SVP International found in their survey of SVP members that meeting other members (23%) had the most impact on their civic involvement, followed by SVP had no impact (21%), serving on a grant committee and volunteering with an investee (both 17%), serving on an internal SVP committee or board (12%), and attending donor education seminars (8%). See Kahn, 2007.

Political orientation is also positively correlated with civic engagement levels, and for giving circle members, this correlation is large in absolute value (0.348) and is statistically significant. Specifically, this means that the more liberal the giving circle member, the more likely they are to be civically engaged. For the control group, this correlation is insignificant and smaller (0.103).

Table 15: Level of Engagement in the Giving Circle and Size of Giving Circle

GC Engagement Activities	Correlation with Size of GC⁷⁷	p-value
Attended full membership meetings	-0.122	0.029*
Participated in committee meetings	0.001	0.986
Held leadership position(s)	-0.192	0.0007*
Attended educational sessions	-0.074	0.208
Helped raise funds	0.008	0.890
Went on site visits	0.151	0.010*
Attended social events	-0.1161	0.039*
Took part in deciding who received funding	0.212	0.000*
Volunteered with funding recipient or other nonprofit	-0.098	0.09
Took action on policy issue	-0.047	0.427

*Statistically significant difference

Survey data also show that as the size of the giving circle increases, the amount of volunteering decreases; which means that members of larger giving circles are *less* likely to increase their volunteer time. This is somewhat surprising considering that an earlier study indicated that larger giving circles are more likely to offer members volunteer opportunities.⁷⁸ However, this may be explained by our survey sample, which did not necessarily include giving circles that put a heavy emphasis on volunteering. It may also be explained by the survey data that show that as the size of the giving circle increases, its members are less engaged in some aspects of the giving circle’s operations (see Table 15).⁷⁹ We found a statistically significant *negative* correlation between size of giving circle and attending full membership meetings, holding leadership positions, attending educational sessions, attending social events, volunteering with funding recipient, and taking action on policy issues. As the size of the giving circle increases, engagement in these activities decreases. The other indicators had positive correlations and two were statistically significant: going on site visits and taking part in funding decisions, which means as giving circle size increases, engagement in these activities also increases.

Political Action

While members reported in the survey that participation in a giving circle increased their involvement in changing government policy and the frequency of their participation to address

⁷⁷ These were coded as: 1 = not at all, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently. Not applicable was treated as missing.

⁷⁸ Eikenberry, 2009.

⁷⁹ Overall, giving circle engagement level had a negative correlation with size of the giving circle: The correlation coefficient is -0.07, but not significant with a p-value 0.19.

problems in the community, many interviewees said that participation in giving circles has not had a major effect on their political activities. Those who did think they had become more politically active since joining a giving circle can be divided into two categories. In the first are those who have been motivated by a growing awareness of community problems through the giving circle and so have become more involved in local elections, writing elected officials, or supporting various groups and paying closer attention to social issues (#2A, 2B, 7B, 10A, 11A). The second are those who want or are inclined to be politically active but were not because they did not feel like they had an avenue for political action. For example, since joining her giving circle, one respondent began identifying “other ways to effect change” including joining the Committee for World Outreach and volunteering abroad (#6A). Another interviewee discussed how the giving circle meetings enabled her to learn about local issues and then take action (#5B). In addition, one giving circle in our sample was formed specifically in response to U.S. international policy following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and members’ desire “to make a positive contribution at the international level” (#10B).

Nonetheless, the number of members who say they are more politically active because of the giving circle is small. Part of the reason for this may be that giving circle members were already quite active before joining the giving circle. They see, to a large degree, that the giving circle is just another way to be active (#3B, 4D, 5A, 5B, 7B, 8A, 11A). Another reason may be that some see instead that their work and volunteer activities are forms of political action or some just do not see themselves as political activists (#2A, 4B, 4C, 7B, 11B).

While giving circle participation does not necessarily increase direct political activity, several of those interviewed did seem to give greater thought to the relationship between what they learned through the giving circle and their political behaviors (#1C, 4D, 8D). For example, one interviewee said the giving circle did not increase her political activity but it did make her question whether she was doing enough (#8D). Another person, who believed the giving circle might be a form of political action in itself but with limitations, said:

You just don’t want to be too verbal and write certain things, only because then you expose yourself to an audit and a possible losing of your status as a donor-advised fund . . . and that’s my concern . . . I think that people, when it comes to the giving circle, are just more careful. (#2A)

In addition, several people talked about how their experience in a giving circle inspired them to talk more about political issues with their friends and family (#2A, 4A, 10A) and helped them figure out where to go to get something done (#8A).

In general, giving circle members seem to already be active within the community and the giving circle is just a new or additional outlet for that engagement. While members do not necessarily see giving circles as political outlets, they do seem to view them as a means for engaging in the community. A number of interviewees thought it possible for the giving circle to have political influence on the larger community once it had more money and members (#4A, 4C, 8B, 8C). For these individuals, money seems to be primarily equated with influence and power and they see the giving circle as less capable of making a political difference without more money and more members. Other interviewees, however, did not see their giving circle as a political outlet,

regardless of the amount of members or money (#2B, 4B, 4D, 8B, 9C). Participant observation notes also showed that there is very little “political talk” during giving circle meetings.

Philanthropic and Civic Awareness/Knowledge

Philanthropy and Nonprofit Organizations

Giving circles appear to change giving circle members’ awareness and knowledge about philanthropy and nonprofit organizations in a number of ways. At least one-third of our interviewees described how the giving circle enabled them to learn more about philanthropy in its various facets. For example, they learned about grant making and the general process for giving money away (#3A, 4A, 4B, 10A) and monitoring funding impact (#7B). One person mentioned gaining “a more finely honed sense of how to go about [doing] philanthropy” (#10C), and others talked about having a better understanding of the complexity and challenges of philanthropy itself (#3B, 10A, 10C) and learning “more about the giving side rather than the asking side” (#4A). This includes a better understanding of the terminology used in the philanthropic world (#2B, 10C) and the availability of other philanthropic tools such as planned giving and women’s foundations (#1A, 4B, 6A, 7B). Related to this final point, one person said that “...had a giving circle concept not come around, been part of the equation, my knowledge would have been limited to big foundations, family foundations, and corporate giving” (#8C).

Giving circle participation also seems to increase many members’ knowledge about the nonprofit organizations working in their communities and internationally to address various issues and serve various constituencies. About half of the people we interviewed, all in small groups and formal organizations, noted learning about new, unfamiliar, and often smaller nonprofit organizations because of the giving circle (#2A, 4A, 4B, 4C, 5A, 5B, 6A; 7A, 8B, 8C, 9A, 9B, 9C). For example, one person in a small Asian-focused group noted: “I’m learning . . . there are all these South Asian groups that I didn’t know about and Chinatown groups that I didn’t really know about. So I’m learning a lot about some really cool stuff” (#2A). Another person, who belongs to a group that focuses on funding international women’s groups, said: “it’s raised my awareness of names and other kinds of groups, maybe even some countries that I didn’t necessarily know too much about” (#5B). Even an interviewee who works in the organized philanthropic world (for a community foundation) said that she had learned more about nonprofit organizations in the community. She noted when asked if the giving circle had exposed her to new issues or areas:

Absolutely . . . I think I can say, oh, I work in philanthropy so I see what’s out there, but realistically, I don’t see what’s out there, and [the giving circle] really does allow me to understand that there’s, you know, there are some small organizations tackling big problems. (#9A)

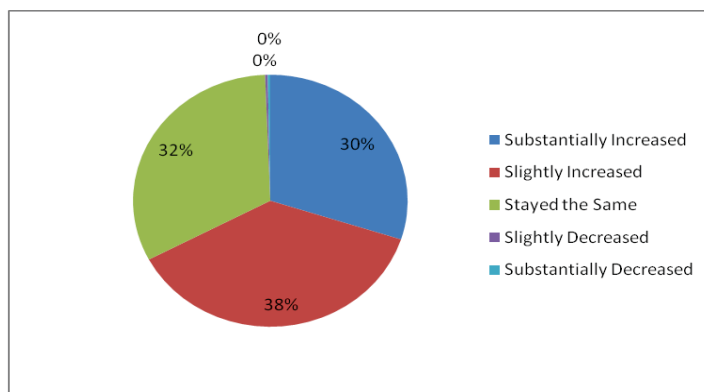
Similarly, another person who works for a foundation and knows a good deal about the nonprofit organizations in her community admitted that even though she knows a lot about certain

organizations already, other giving circle members provided her with a new perspective on these organizations (#8C).

In addition to knowing more about nonprofit organizations that exist and looking at them from a different perspective, giving circle members reported in the survey and through interviews that participation in a giving circle increased their knowledge about how nonprofit organizations operate. Among giving circle member respondents, 68 percent reported that their knowledge of how nonprofit organizations operate increased after joining a giving circle (Q. #11d), while only 2 members indicated that their knowledge about nonprofits decreased (see Figure 8).

Furthermore, those with higher levels of giving circle engagement were more likely to say that they increased their awareness of how nonprofits operate and this awareness increased as their length of membership in a giving circle increased.⁸⁰

Figure 8: Change in Awareness of How Nonprofit Organizations Operate



Several of those interviewed also mentioned increased understanding of how nonprofit organizations operate, and many of these were members of giving circles focused around racial/ethnic identities (#1B, 1C, 2B, 3A, 7A, 9A, 9C). This increased understanding included nonprofit agency funding needs, sources and strategy (#2A, 7A, 9B), day-to-day “insider knowledge” of nonprofits picked up at giving circle meetings (#2B), the general nature of nonprofit organizations (#3A), and the burdens placed on community organizations (#1B). Our participant observers also noted that operating needs and funding issues for nonprofit organizations were discussed, sometimes in great detail, during meetings.

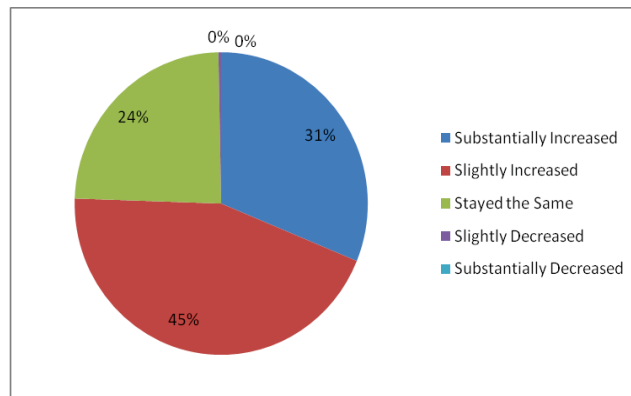
Community and Civic Issues

We also asked giving circle survey respondents and interviewees about their awareness of problems in the community and how this has been affected by their participation in a giving circle. Giving circle members reported in the survey (Q. #11e) that participation has increased their awareness of community problems: 76 percent of giving circle members reported that their awareness of community problems had increased due to their participation in a giving circle, while only one person reported that his/her knowledge of community problems had decreased

⁸⁰ With a correlation coefficient 0.158.

(see Figure 9). In addition, data indicate that as length of time participating in a giving circle increases, awareness of community problems also increases,⁸¹ and those with higher levels of engagement in a giving circle were more likely to say that they increased their awareness of problems in the community. These survey data were confirmed by eleven interviewees (#2B, 3A, 4B, 6A, 8A, 9B, 9C, 10A, 10B, 10C, 11B) from all types of giving circles, who cited being “more aware of certain issues” (#2B), having greater awareness and expanded knowledge about issues (#6A), learning “an incredible amount” through the giving circle (#10B), not knowing the prevalence of issues before being in the giving circle (#3A), and gaining “new exposure” to certain issues (#11B).

Figure 9: Change in Awareness of Problems in the Community



Along these lines, some people were inspired to find out much more about an issue once exposed to it through the giving circle. For example, one person interviewed provided a detailed description of an issue they are more aware of and passionate about after hearing about it during a site visit to a potential nonprofit funding recipient—the need for a simple ophthalmological test that would keep children from going blind but that is not required by law to be given in most states (#9B). Another person talked about issues she learned about through the giving circle and most likely would not have heard about otherwise: inadequate drinking water and economic development in developing countries (#6A).

Others also noted that they felt they gained a more nuanced awareness of community issues (#2A, 7A, 8C, 9A, 9C, 10C). For example, one member of a Latino-focused giving circle noted:

At the table are all Latinos [in the giving circle], at the table at my job, I’m the only Latina. So, it’s interesting to see where the Latino is the common element, and then suddenly, the male perspective, the female perspective, the younger, the older, the South side, the North side, the professional, the grassroots, all that stuff starts to elevate a bit more, whereas we sometimes don’t drill down that far at [the foundation where I work]. So, clearly, it is sort of the nuance of the giving circle. (#8C)

⁸¹ With a correlation coefficient 0.242.

Giving circle members seem more likely to have a better awareness and knowledge about the community than people not in a giving circle. The survey results show (Q. #13a) that giving circle members are much more likely than control group members to agree or strongly agree that they are aware of community needs and understand which organizations are working to address these needs. The difference between the two groups is quite significant at a 99 percent confidence level. This finding has one of the highest levels of statistical significance in the study (it is one of the findings least likely due to chance). In addition, the differences between giving circle members and the control group in knowing whom to contact to find a solution to a community problem is significantly greater for giving circle members (Q. #13b).⁸²

Not all of those interviewed, however, thought they had gained an increased awareness about community issues. Some noted that they were already aware of the issues before joining the giving circle because they work in the nonprofit/philanthropic sector or were already a “concerned activist” focused on the area (#1C; 5A, 5B, 7C, 7D, 8C). One person also noted that she joined the giving circle because it focused on issues with which she was already involved (#3B). However, it appears from the interviews that participation in a giving circle still brought greater breadth and depth of knowledge to members previously engaged in the community. For instance, even those that came into their group already with a heightened level of awareness of the issues and problems in the community found the gender focus of the giving circle raised their awareness of problems facing young girls and women (#1A). Another person in a loose network that provides assistance to individuals in need said that she is now much more in tune with the needs of the poor:

I think I’m just much more aware of the nitty-gritty of needs that happen every day. I just feel like, now, I’m just sort of on the front line, of how many people have no teeth and they can’t afford dentures and how impossible it is to get dentures if you have no money. And aware of what the system of getting subsidized housing is and when you get up to the top of the list, you have to put a security deposit down, and the security deposit is market value, even though your rent might be \$71 a month your security deposit is probably \$780. There’s no way you can come up with \$780 so then you lose your place in line because you can’t get your apartment. So I’m just now educated in a very concrete way about the details of what happens if you are poor. (#11A)

Philanthropic and Civic Perceptions/Attitudes

Philanthropy

We asked interviewees if being in a giving circle had changed their perceptions about the role of philanthropy in their lives. Four people indicated that participation had influenced their view of the role of philanthropy in their lives, though perhaps not a radical change (#3A, 4A, 6A, 9C). Each person mentioned that the giving circle made philanthropy a more central focus in their

⁸² p-value less than 0.002

lives or made them more thoughtful about the role of philanthropy in their life. One person said it this way:

I guess it's more of a central part of my life since I'm trying to turn it into a job, in a way, devoting a lot of time to it. I guess so. But I wouldn't say it's a huge, radical shift, because I've been on the grant seeking side for most of my life, professionally. (#4A)

Another person noted: "I guess it's changed in the fact that I think of myself as a philanthropist" (#3A). Finally, another person said:

I guess, before [giving circle], it wasn't something that I did on a regular basis it wasn't something that I did every single month, and with this you get a monthly newsletter, and an introduction into what the organization for the next month will be and it's almost like a reminder, I mean, a pleasant reminder. It's just become more regular. (#6A)

Seven other interviewees said specifically that they did not think their perception of philanthropy had changed. A few of these people said that philanthropy has always been important in their lives. For some, the giving circle just "reinforced" their beliefs (#2A). However, several others noted that even though there has not been a major change, they felt, through the giving circle, "closer to the action" (#11B), that giving was easier (#2B), and helped them to do more (#5B). As one interviewee noted:

What I think it's done is it's enabled me to feel that I'm enlarging. I think it's given me another tool and, I'm grateful for it because it's allowed me to be more philanthropic. I don't know that it's changed my attitude because my attitude was always there, but it's helped me to do more. (#5B)

One interesting aspect of change in perceptions brought up by some of those interviewed was how the giving circle has changed how they *relate* to funding recipients (#6A, 10A, 11B). As one person in an internationally-focused giving circle noted about the giving circle's funding recipients:

We do see now, after being in Africa for three or four years, we've stayed with these groups, and we've seen things improve. They tell us and we know and now we have personal relationships with these people, and so that's the best thing out of it. (#10A)

Along these lines, among most of the non-white ethnically/racially-focused giving circle members, interviewees said that the focus of the giving circle in serving their own ethnic/racial community was an important factor in participating in the giving circle (#1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 4A, 4B, 8A, 8B, 8C). Interviewees from several of these giving circles also expressed positive attitudes about working with members of their own community in a more direct and hands-on way for the benefit of the racial/ethnic community (#1A, 3A, 4C, 8A, 8D).

Community and Civic Issues

According to survey results, giving circle members and the control group did not differ significantly in their confidence or ability to make the community a better place to live or influence public policy (Q. #13d, 13c). The means were very close and the differences not statistically significant (see Table 16). When asked about the positive impact of giving on the health of a community (Q. #13e), whether the government should do something to reduce income differences (Q. #13f), and ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living (Q. #13g), giving circle members were more likely to give a positive answer, and all these differences were statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. This result is not surprising since giving circle members report they are more liberal in their political orientation than the control group.

Table 16: Difference in Political & Social Attitudes/Perceptions

Attitude/Perception Indicator	t	p-value
I have the ability to influence public policy	0.538	0.590
I can make my community a better place to live	1.77	0.077
Giving money and volunteering can have a positive impact on the health of a community	2.368	0.018*
Government should do something to reduce income differences between rich and poor	4.527	0.000*
Government should ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living	4.701	0.000*

*Statistically significant difference

In general, there is little effect on these attitudes and perceptions when length of membership in a giving circle increases or size of a giving circle increases except that the longer someone is in a giving circle, or the larger the giving circle, the *less* members believe that giving and volunteering have a positive impact on the health of a community. This is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Conversely, the belief in government's responsibility to reduce income differences between the rich and poor and to ensure a decent standard of living increased with size of the giving circle. This was also statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level (see Table 17).

One reason for this may be that giving circles with more of a focus on donor education, which is more likely to be found in larger, more formal giving circles, influence members to see the abilities and limitations of nonprofits and government in addressing social issues. With increased knowledge, they come to believe that giving and volunteering are not sufficient and that government needs to play a larger role in addressing community problems. Several interviewees did bring up the importance of nonprofits and government working together to solve societal problems and saw this as positive (#3B, 6A, 8B, 11B), while others said they have changed their attitudes about the complexity and funding of social problems (#1A, 7A, 9C). Interviewees noted more awareness about what government programs are lacking, failures in the system (#11A), and scarcity and limits of government funding (#8B).

Table 17: Giving Circle Members' Political & Social Attitudes/Perceptions Correlated with Length of Membership and Size of Giving Circle

Attitude/Perception Indicator	Correlation with Length	p-value	Correlation with Size	p-value
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I have the ability to influence public policy	-0.027	0.623	0.045	0.414
I can make my community a better place to live	-0.077	0.160	0.026	0.637
Giving money and volunteering can have a positive impact on the health of a community	-0.109	0.047*	-0.137	0.013*
Government should do something to reduce income differences between rich and poor	-0.066	0.227	0.117	0.034*
Government should ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living	0.0024	0.966	0.129	0.019*

*Statistically significant difference

For some, attitudes toward government were those of frustration and anger (#1B, 4A, 5B, 7B, 10B), while there was little of this expressed toward nonprofits. One person said, in fact, that they had more confidence in nonprofits’ ability to make a difference: “I see the role of nonprofits as much more important than I used to. I didn’t really realize their ability to make a difference. I didn’t realize it was as powerful as it seems to be” (#10B). In terms of a change in attitude regarding whether government or nonprofits should address social problems, more said it had not changed (#4A, 5B, 7B, 8B, 8D, 9A) than it had changed (#2B, 3A, 3B, 6A), and one person said their attitude was solidified or confirmed by their experience in the giving circle (#7C).

Giving circle members also articulated that participation in the giving circle made them feel more empowered, describing the experience as “nice empowerment” (#7A), and “you feel sort of a power of this movement . . . the power of this big thing” (#4A). Others described themselves as feeling “more capable to participate in community change” (#10B), that an individual can have more of an impact (#10A), and that they felt they were making a bigger impact than they would individually (#5A, 5B, 7A, 8A). One interviewee found giving as a group confers “a whole new level of legitimacy” (#8C). Another person said she has not changed but: “I’m just more activated in a concrete way. I don’t think my beliefs have changed, I think . . . I sort of have a very specific wish list for what I want the next president to do” (#11A). Members also expressed positive attitudes about having an impact through the giving circle. One member of an internationally-focused giving circle described it as a giving circle that began as a small group “committed, very intelligent . . . people who are able to do what . . . their intentions are” (#10B).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to understand the impacts of participating in giving circles on members' engagement in, knowledge of, and attitudes toward philanthropy and civic life. Our findings, mainly based on surveys and interviews, suggest that giving circles have important impacts on participants in a number of ways.

- Giving circle members give more in total charitable donations, although the increase may not be substantial enough to make up for income effects. Total giving increases as level of engagement and length of time in a giving circle increases and number of giving circle memberships increases.
- Giving circle members give more strategically and more broadly, especially to organizations supporting women and girls and ethnic/minority groups—groups often neglected by mainstream organized philanthropy. Giving in these areas increases in particular for white and male members but decreases for all members as the size of the giving circle increases. Giving circle members are less likely to support combined general purpose organizations (such as the United Way) and religious purposes.
- Giving circle members tend to be more civically engaged, although it is not certain that this is caused by the giving circle. However, the more engaged someone is in a giving circle, the more likely they are to say that they have increased the amount of time they volunteer and the longer someone is in a giving circle or the more giving circles in which they participate, the more they are civically engaged. Members with higher levels of engagement within a giving circle are also more likely to have higher levels of involvement in changing government policies.
- Giving circle participation does not appear to increase political activity, but members are more comfortable with and more inclined to have political discussions and to see giving circles as a means to be engaged with the community.
- Giving circles have a considerable impact on increasing members' knowledge and awareness of philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and problems in the community.
- Giving circles seem to have little influence on members' perceptions or attitudes about philanthropy, community issues, political and social values, and government and nonprofit roles and responsibilities. However, giving circle members are more likely to believe in the positive impact of giving on the health of a community, that government should do something to reduce income differences, and that government should ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living, though this is tempered by the size of the giving circle.

The following factors seem to matter most, when it comes to giving circles' effects on their members:

Level of Engagement

Level of engagement in the giving circle matters: Those with higher levels of giving circle engagement were more likely to say that they increased their giving, the number of charities they support, the amount of time they volunteer, their awareness of how nonprofits operate and of

problems in the community, their level of civic engagement, and their involvement in changing public policy.

Length of Engagement

Giving circle engagement is strongly associated with length of time in the giving circle. That is, the longer someone is in a giving circle, the more engaged they become in the giving circle or the more engaged someone is in the giving circle, the longer they stay engaged in the giving circle. More time in the giving circle is associated with higher levels of giving and volunteering, more strategic giving, greater awareness of community problems and how nonprofits operate, and higher participation in civic engagement activities. As length of time in a giving circle increases, members are also more likely to report giving to ethnic/minority group-focused activities and for basic needs. This is especially true for people who are not in racially or ethnically-focused groups. Conversely, the longer someone is in a giving circle, the less they believe that giving and volunteering have a positive impact on the health of a community.

Size of the Giving Circle

As the size of the giving circle increases, members' level of giving and use of giving strategies increase while giving to ethnic and minority groups, and engagement within the giving circle and in the community beyond the giving circle decreases. In addition, as the size of the giving circle increases, members are less likely to think that charitable giving has a positive impact on the community but more likely to think that the government has a responsibility to address income inequality and ensure a decent standard of living for everyone.

Gender and Race

Even though we often think of giving circles as mainly women's philanthropy, we found that male giving circle respondents were as likely as female giving circle respondents to say that they changed (or did not change) their behavior because of the giving circle. Men and women in giving circles were not different with statistical significance in how often they reported changing the amount they give, the number of charities they give to, time they volunteer, their level of knowledge about nonprofit organizations, their knowledge of community problems, or their community participation. However, male giving circle members were more likely than women in giving circles to report changing their involvement in efforts to bring about policy changes. Female giving circle members are also much more likely to donate to causes focused on women than are male giving circle members.

People who identified themselves as part of an ethnic/minority-focused group were less likely than other respondents to report changing their total donation amount or increasing their involvement in efforts to change policy as a result of their membership in a giving circle. Ethnic/minority-focused group members were also much less likely to donate to causes related to women and girls. However, more members of color (not only those specifically in a minority-focused giving circle) reported considering cultural differences in making a giving decision and respondents in ethnic/minority-focused giving circles were highly likely to donate to

ethnic/minority-focused charitable activities and less likely, with statistical significance, to give to all other areas when compared with other giving circle respondents.

Recommendations

Overall, giving circle members seem to be drawing stronger connections between community needs, their own charitable contributions, and nonprofits' organizational effectiveness. It appears that understanding how nonprofits work, the work they do, and what their needs are, and gaining a keener, more educated awareness of community needs, causes members to think more about and plan for their giving. This, in turn, encourages them to develop and/or enhance their giving strategy and increase and expand their giving, especially to organizations and areas not as well supported by traditional organized philanthropy.

Several recommendations can be drawn from the study's findings:

Invest in Giving Circles for the Long-Term and on Engaging Members

Giving circles' impact increases with the level of engagement and longevity of member participation; therefore, giving circles and organizations that support and host giving circles need to invest in giving circles for the long term and focus energy on engaging members in the various activities of the giving circle as well as retaining members over time.

Because of the apparent important effect of experiential learning, giving circle members should be encouraged to engage in more than formal education workshops. Deciding on funding and engaging with funding recipients are also, perhaps more, important influences on members. Socializing may also be important for engaging and retaining members.

Be Conscious of the Goals of the Giving Circle

Size of the giving circle also appears to have important influence on giving circle members' behaviors, attitudes and perceptions. Depending on the goals of the giving circle, leaders or hosts may want to increase the size and formality of the group—to potentially increase members' use of giving strategies—or decrease the size and formality of the giving circle to encourage diversification of giving and increases in engagement. For those interested in the positive effect of giving circles on civic engagement and on diversifying giving, it appears that smaller is better.

Don't Worry about Shifting Funds

Generally, host organizations and other philanthropic supporters should not worry about giving circles' diverting funds away from causes and organizations already supported because giving circles appear to cause members to give more and give more broadly rather than shift giving. Giving circles may be displacing, however, funds that go to combined charity campaigns such as United Way and for religious purposes.

Help Giving Circles Increase Awareness about Community and Policy

Giving circles help donors to learn about community organizations, issues, and solutions and enhance the giving strategy of donors. They are just as or more important as tools for increasing this awareness, and enhancing giving strategy, as they may be for increasing giving. Giving circles and their hosts can be intentional about introducing members to organizations that are off the “beaten path” for many philanthropic organizations and donors. Because even people working in organized philanthropy gain a more nuanced view of nonprofit organizations and community issues by being in a giving circle, community, family and other foundations and nonprofit organizations might encourage staff to participate in a giving circle.

Even though giving circles are generally not political in a partisan sense, they seem to be important for helping members understand public policy issues and increasing awareness about issues in the community. From nonprofit organizations seeking to recruit diverse board members to public administrators seeking to appoint diverse citizen representatives, giving circles may serve as reservoirs for bringing informed citizens, in particular women and people of color, into public service.

Future Research

There are several avenues from which this research might be extended, using data from this study as well as gathering new data with our survey instrument and through other methods.

First, various types of giving circles and giving circles affiliated with various identity groups need to be included to a greater degree in this research. While we asked some questions about race and other identities, we recommend more exploration of the influence of identity affiliations on giving circle members and their philanthropy. How do giving circles relate to the cultural traditions of these groups? African-American, Latino, Jewish, gay and lesbian groups and others deserve more attention.

We were also not able, in this research, to include as many past members of giving circles as we had hoped. A more concerted effort might be made to survey and interview this population to understand how they were affected by the giving circle, why they left the group, and what might motivate them to stay in the group. Given the importance of level and length of engagement on the effects of giving circles, understanding this population is now of even greater significance.

Finally, giving circles appear to have an effect on perceptions about the impact of giving on the community and the need for government to address inequities and ensure a decent standard of living. In particular, as length of time in a giving circle increases, the less members believe that giving and volunteering have a positive impact on the health of a community, while the belief in government’s responsibility to reduce income differences between the rich and poor and to ensure a decent standard of living increases with size of the giving circle. Do people become more realistic in their expectations of their own impact and the need for government over time and with increased knowledge? To what degree does this change have to do with engagement and increased knowledge? More research is needed to understand this shift in perception and to explore its implications for civic engagement.

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APPENDIX

Survey on Philanthropy and Civic Engagement

This survey is completely confidential and voluntary. We will not match your answers to your name or address and will not share your answers with anyone. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

1. During the past 12 months, did your household make a charitable **contribution**? *Charitable contributions are defined as charitable giving from personal accounts that your household controls and may include money or assets with monetary value.*

No (SKIP to #12)
 Yes



2. During the past 12 months, did your household make a charitable contribution:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
For religious purposes or spiritual development ? For example, to a church, synagogue, mosque, TV or radio ministry? (Please do not include donations made to schools, hospitals, and other charities run by religious organizations).			
To help people in need of food, shelter, or other basic necessities ?			
For health care or medical research ? For example, hospitals, nursing homes, mental health facilities, heart and lung associations.			
For educational purposes ? For example, colleges, grade schools, PTAs, libraries, scholarship funds. (Do not include direct tuition payments).			
To organizations that support or promote the arts, culture, or ethnic awareness ? For example, a museum, theatre, orchestra.			
For sports and recreation purposes ? For example, soccer clubs, youth programs, and family events.			
To organizations that support women and girls ?			
To organizations that support ethnic or minority groups?			
To an organization that serves a combination of purposes ? For example, the United Way, the United Jewish Appeal, or Catholic Charities.			
For purposes other than those mentioned above ? For example, the environment, neighborhood development, advocacy, and international aid.			

3. What is your best estimate of the **total amount** your household contributed during the past 12 months?

\$ _____, _____, _____

4. What is your best estimate of the **total number of organizations or charities** your household contributed to during the past 12 months?

Number of organizations/charities _____

5. Thinking about the larger charitable contributions your household made during the past 12 months, how often do each of the following statements apply to these contributions?

	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Don't Know
I/We contributed based on advancing a vision for change that I'd/we'd like to see in the world.					
I/We conducted research to help decide which organizations to support.					
I/We solicited input from and/or collaborated with others to make funding decisions.					
I/We supported general operating expenses in addition to or instead of specific programs.					
I/We used organizational performance data to inform funding decisions.					
I/We gave multi-year gifts.					
I/We took into consideration cultural differences (language, values, communication styles), race, class, and/or gender in making funding decisions.					

6. Do you belong to a giving circle? A giving circle is a group of individuals who pool money and other resources and decide together where to give these away. This does not include donor recognition programs that nonprofit organizations use to honor donors.

- No/Don't Know (SKIP to #12)
- Yes



7. How many giving circles do you currently belong to?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

For questions 8 through 11, if you belong to more than one giving circle, please answer based on the giving circle you have participated in the longest.

8. How long have you been a member of this giving circle?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 years or more

9. How much money does your household typically give to this giving circle each year?

\$ _____, _____, _____

10. How often in the past 12 months have you participated in the following through your giving circle?

	Frequently	Some times	Rarely	Not at all	Does not apply to my giving circle
Attended full membership meetings					
Participated in committee meetings					
Held leadership position(s) (such as committee head, officer, or administrator of the giving circle)					
Attended educational sessions (including presentations by nonprofit staff or other experts)					
Helped raise funds (for example, found gifts from donors outside of the giving circle or organized a fundraising event).					
Went on site visits to potential funding recipients.					
Attended social events (such as dinner parties, lunches or other gatherings that may or may not be held in conjunction with a business meeting).					
Voted or took part in deciding on who received funding or other support from the giving circle.					
Volunteered with funding recipient or other nonprofit.					
Took action on local, national or international policy issue.					

11. How has participation in this giving circle affected the following?

	Substantially Increased	Slightly Increased	Stayed the Same	Slightly Decreased	Substantially Decreased
The total amount I/we contribute each year.					
The total number of organizations I/we support each year.					
The amount of time I/we volunteer each year.					
My/our awareness of how nonprofit organizations operate.					
My/our awareness of problems in the community.					
My/our participation in efforts to address problems in the community.					
My/our involvement in changing government policies at the local, national or international levels.					

12. Have you participated in any of the following activities during the past year?

	Yes	No
Worked together with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community.		
Volunteered or did voluntary community service for no pay.		
Belonged to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally. For example labor unions, professional associations, political or social groups, sports or youth groups.		
Held a leadership role for any groups or associations. For example board member, officer, or committee chair.		
Besides donating money, helped raise money for a charitable cause. (This includes personally walking, running or bicycling for a charitable cause).		
Voted in a local and/or national election (during the past 1 or 2 years).		
Talked to others when there was an election or campaign taking place to try to convince them to vote for or against one of the parties, candidates or issues.		
Contributed money or volunteered for a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supports candidates.		
Contacted or visited a public official – at any level of government – to express your opinion.		
Contacted a newspaper, magazine, television or radio talk show, or blog/website to express your opinion about a political or social issue.		
Took part in a protest, march, or demonstration.		
Signed an e-mail or petition about a political or social issue.		
NOT bought something from a certain company because you disagreed with the social or political values of the company that produces or markets it.		
Bought something because you liked the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it.		

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In general, I am aware of community needs and understand which organizations (including nonprofit, government or business) are working to address those needs.					
Usually, if I see a problem or need in the community, I can find out whom to contact to help find a solution.					
I have the ability to influence public policy.					
I can make my community a better place to live.					
Giving money and volunteering can have a positive impact on the health of a community.					
Government should do something to reduce income differences between rich and poor.					
Government should ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living.					

About You

Why do we ask personal questions? These questions are only meant to help us understand how different characteristics influence charitable giving and civic engagement. We will not be able to match these characteristics to your name or address and will not share your personal information with anyone.

14. Are you: | Female | Male

15. In what year were you born? _ _ _ _

16. What is your race or ethnicity?

- African-American/Black
- Arab-American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- Multi-racial
- Native American
- White/Caucasian
- Other

17. What was your **total household income before taxes last year** (include income from spouses, partners, etc.)?

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 to \$14,999
- \$15,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$34,999
- \$35,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 or more

18. What is the current value of your **total household net worth, assets less liabilities** (including real estate and other assets)?

- Negative or \$0
- \$1 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 to \$499,999
- \$500,000 to \$999,999
- \$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999
- \$5,000,000 to \$9,999,999
- \$10,000,000 to \$19,999,999
- \$20,000,000 or more

19. What was your **highest grade of school or level of education completed**?

- High school or less
- Vocational school or some college
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree (BA/BS/AB)
- Master's or advanced degree (J.D., M.D., Ph.D)

20. Which of the following best describes your current employment?

<input type="checkbox"/> Not employed	<input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing, production.
<input type="checkbox"/> Arts, entertainment, sports or media	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales: retail or wholesale.

<input type="checkbox"/> General management, business, or financial, including information technology, statistical analysis, and other mathematical occupations	<input type="checkbox"/> Services: restaurant, physical fitness, office and administrative support, in-home services, health care support occupation
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional (lawyer, doctor, nurse, accountant or other profession requiring special training and certification).	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary production such as farming, fishing, forestry, mining.
<input type="checkbox"/> Education (teacher, professor, administrator, librarian, language instruction, training, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Construction, building trades, installation, repair, and maintenance, landscape design and maintenance.
<input type="checkbox"/> Social services, including care for elderly or children, social work, counseling, nonprofit organization serving those in need.	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation.
<input type="checkbox"/> Other nonprofit or voluntary associations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Other.
<input type="checkbox"/> Public safety, including military.	<input type="checkbox"/> Retired.

21. How often do you attend religious services?

- Do not attend
- Once a year or less
- Several times a year
- About once a month
- Once a week or more

22. How many years have you lived in your current community?

_____ years

23. What is your marital status?

- Married or in a long-term partnership/widowed
- Single, never been married
- Single, divorced

24. How many children, aged 17 or younger, live in your household?

_____ Children under 17

25. Thinking politically and socially, how would you describe your general outlook?

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Middle-of-the road/Moderate
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative
- Don't know/No interest

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this study!

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience being part of a giving circle.
 - a. What is/was your role within the giving circle?
 - b. How long have you been involved?
 - c. Why do you/did you participate in a giving circle?
 - d. Does race or ethnicity play a role in your connections to the giving circle? How so?
 - e. If applicable—why did you leave the giving circle?
2. Before your involvement in the giving circle, how active were you philanthropically?
 - a. Did you use other modes of giving, such as individual check writing, donor advised funds or a foundation?
 - b. Did you volunteer or were otherwise engaged in a voluntary group?
 - c. How strategic were you in your giving and volunteering?
3. Has participation in the giving circle changed the way you practice philanthropy?
 - a. Has it changed the amount that you give? Can you estimate how much?
 - b. Has it changed how you give; like how often and at what levels?
 - c. Where you give?
 - d. Has it helped you to understand and use various tools of philanthropy?
 - e. Do you think you are more strategic in your philanthropy? How so?
4. Has participation in the giving circle changed the way you think about the role of philanthropy in your life?
 - a. Has your philosophy about philanthropy changed with your participation in the giving circle? What did you used to think about it? What do you think now?
5. Has participation in the giving circle changed your level of awareness or perceptions about issues and problems in the community?
 - a. The role and processes of government or nonprofits in addressing community problems?
 - b. The role of citizens in addressing community problems?
6. How active were you in the community before joining the giving circle? Has it changed since your participation in the giving circle?
 - a. Do you see the giving circle as a tool for being more involved in your community? How so?
 - b. Have you used other modes of civic involvement such as participating in voluntary groups and taking other forms of political action? How do they compare to your experience in the giving circle?
 - c. Did participation in the giving circle make you more capable of participating in broader civic arenas?
 - d. Do you use your social networks/personal connections through the giving circle to make community change?
 - e. Do you think the giving circle has enabled you to have a seat at the table? What does it mean to have a seat at the table? What do you do with your seat at the table?

- f. Has your participation in the giving circle led to more direct political action?
- 7. Since joining the giving circle, have you changed the way you think about the role of government and nonprofits in society?
 - a. Have your political or social values changed?
- 8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience participating in a giving circle?

Participant Observer Protocol

Directions: During or immediately following the meeting, please write or type up your observations, paying particular attention to the following areas. If something interesting happens that is not a focus, describe it anyway at the end of the protocol. Use the back of the sheet if needed. Thank you!

Areas of Focus	Observations
<p>Atmosphere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe the location of the meeting. ▪ Describe the general atmosphere among the people in the meeting (i.e. formal/informal, social/professional, etc.) 	
<p>Topics/Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe the topics discussed in the meeting—both formal and informal. ▪ What topics seemed to dominate discussion? ▪ In what ways were these topics discussed (presentations, dialogue, debate, etc.) 	
<p>Community/Civic Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What community or public policy issues did members talk about (i.e. health care, homelessness, etc.)? ▪ If applicable, describe the level of knowledge displayed by members about these issues. ▪ What position did members take on these issues? ▪ What did they think needed to be done about these issues? ▪ Was any action suggested or taken by members related to these issues (such as writing to representative or organizing advocacy work)? 	

Areas of Focus	Observations
<p>Nonprofits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What nonprofits did members talk about (such as United Way or the local women’s shelter)? ▪ If possible, describe the level of knowledge displayed by members about nonprofits. ▪ Do members talk about funding needs or fundraising practices of nonprofits? Is it in a vague or detailed fashion? ▪ What were members’ attitudes toward funding challenges faced by non-profits? ▪ Describe how members talk about relationships with grantees. 	
<p>Volunteering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What kind of discussion took place about volunteering with a nonprofit or other organization? ▪ Where do members volunteer? What do they do? 	
<p>Personal Impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did members talk about their own philanthropy? ▪ Did members indicate the influence the giving circle has had on their own giving and volunteering? ▪ Did they discuss impacts of the giving circle on them socially, intellectually, emotionally, etc? 	

Other Happenings of Interest: