

## What is a Giving Circle?

- A group of individuals who come together to give philanthropically.
- An accessible, democratic, collaborative form of philanthropy.

Giving circles, groups of individuals who pool their resources to share with their community or others, are not a new phenomenon. Giving circles of various types have existed across cultures throughout history. Today, there are around 2,000 giving circles across the U.S. who come together to make collaborative decisions about where to share resources in this accessible, democratic and relationship-based form of giving.

### **So what do giving circles do, and how do they do it?**

Anyone can start a giving circle focused on any issue or community. They are often groups of friends or neighbors with shared values, and the majority of giving-circle members in the U.S. today are women. By pooling their resources, members maximize the impact of their giving. They also enjoy the personal connections that can be built and deepened by giving in this way. Giving circles often learn together about issues members care about, and in addition to giving money, members often volunteer together at the organizations they support.

There are giving circles focused on just about every issue and community. There's the Asian Women's Giving Circle. The Third Wave Fund hosts a Sex Worker Giving Circle. Amplifier creates and supports giving circles inspired by Jewish values. There is a large network of Latino giving circles at the Latino Community Foundation in California, and the Community Investment Network is a national network of giving circles focused on African Americans and communities of color—just to name a few.

The number of giving circles in the U.S. tripled from 2007 to 2016, according to the Collective Giving Research Group, which reported more than \$1 billion in giving by such circles. Philanthropy Together, a philanthropy-serving organization focused on giving circles, says more than 150,000 people are involved in around 2,000 giving circles across the United States today.



Giving circles can be casual or formalized, all-volunteer or staffed. Some have fiscal sponsors or are hosted at community foundations. Some are nonprofits themselves. And some have no legal tax status at all. In a 2016 survey of the U.S. giving circle landscape, almost half of the groups surveyed had a fiscal sponsor or institutional host (like a community foundation or women's fund), while about a quarter of them operated completely independently.

Each giving circle decides for itself how it will be structured, including how much members will contribute, where and when to meet, and how to make decisions about their giving. Being in a giving circle usually involves a good deal of discussion and collective decision-making—and the connectedness and collaboration is part of the point. Fantasy Football 4 A Cause, a giving circle hosted by the American Muslim Community Foundation, describes itself as “a family initiative to stay connected, trash talk, and gain bragging rights, all while having fun, supporting amazing causes, and giving back to communities.”

Though there are increasing opportunities to institutionalize giving circles, with national and international networks and PSOs dedicated to giving circles, the heart of a giving circle is personal relationships and participation.

### **Can I approach a giving circle about funding?**

All giving circles are different. Some may welcome your ask, and others may not be open to unsolicited requests. Each circle decides together their giving process. If you're interested in connecting with giving circles that might support your organization's work, you may want to build a relationship with a community foundation in your area. This could lead to an introduction to a giving circle that focuses on the same issue your organization does. And of course, networking in your community may also put you on the radar of giving circles with shared concerns and values.



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- Who is a small donor?

