



Reimagining and Reigniting
America's Spirit of Generosity

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News Release

The Generosity Commission to Explore the “Reimagination” of Philanthropy, Volunteerism and Community in America in Times of National Need

A nonpartisan, diverse group of leaders across sectors will explore profound questions that shape the future of giving, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement in the U.S.

CHICAGO (October 12, 2021) – Today marks the launch of the [Generosity Commission](#), a nonpartisan group of leaders across business, philanthropy and civil society that will address the ways in which generosity is expressed in America, particularly during times of stress, and how it can be strengthened. During the next two years, through fresh research and by stimulating a National Conversation, the Generosity Commission will explore and celebrate the many ways philanthropy, volunteerism and community are being redefined. The group’s goal is not only to understand trends around generosity, but to also point to the future of philanthropy and other forms of civic engagement in America.

During its tenure, the Generosity Commission will explore trends in giving and their impact on community-based organizations; whether generosity-related trends are accelerated or interrupted by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns; examine the ways in which volunteering is being redefined by the spontaneous emergence of mutual aid networks; and study what correlation exists between civic engagement and social “connectedness” on the one hand and societal cohesion and democratic functioning on the other.

“We give and volunteer because we care about achieving discrete social and environmental goals,” said Jane Wales, Chair of the Generosity Commission and Vice President of the Aspen Institute. “But we also give and volunteer because having a robust civil society is one of the great attributes of American life and democracy. It is what gives us resilience. And it is at the core of who we are. Tocqueville marveled at it. We all benefit from it.”

The Generosity Commission was born out of a concern about downward trends in middle class “everyday” giving following the Great Recession. Specifically, when it comes to generosity in the U.S.:

- In 2015, the volunteer rate among Americans reached a 15-year low¹
- From 2000 – 2016, 20 million fewer households gave to charity than had previously²
- In 2012, the top 1% of donors gave 43.5% of individual donations, while in 1960, the top 1% of donors gave 18.9% of all donations³

The combination of these downward trends in giving and volunteering along with the more than 40-year gap since the last national conversation on generosity with the Filer Commission, led leadership from the [Giving Institute](#) and [Giving USA Foundation](#) to assemble the Generosity Commission.

While these trends are concerning and can impact the individuals and communities served by generosity, they don't tell the full story. Traditional definitions, tracking and measures of giving and volunteering do not capture the range of acts of generosity that occur today. It is for this reason, along with the vital role that generosity plays in American society, business, culture and democracy, that the Generosity Commission will seek to capture and illuminate the ways in which Americans are reimagining generosity, to fully reflect, celebrate and support the many ways people across the nation meet the needs of their communities, including:

- Embracing new ideas, from crowdfunding to impact investing, direct giving and social entrepreneurship
- Recognizing the many ways people immerse themselves in their communities, from informal and formal volunteering to movement building, activism and advocacy
- Engaging new generations and mobilizing people from all backgrounds
- Bringing people together, building commonality and connection and strengthening communities at a time of division

“Today we face new questions about the nature of our democracy, our social contract and civic identity; the roles of the government, private and nonprofit sectors in our society; and how to ensure that all Americans are included in the process of decision-making and problem-solving in our diverse society,” said Wales. “The Generosity Commission will work to answer these immensely important questions by capturing the ways in which Americans are engaged in collectively reimagining and reigniting our culture of generosity in the U.S. at an hour of need. Only then will we capture the ways in which generosity is viewed and expressed.”

A key component of the Generosity Commission is research commissioned to inform concrete, relevant recommendations, actionable policies and specific steps that will engage individuals and organizations across the nation. This work is now underway and will be completed in 2022.

¹ Source: Grimm, Robert T., Jr., and Dietz, Nathan. 2018. “Where Are America’s Volunteers? A Look at America’s Widespread Decline in Volunteering in Cities and States.” Research Brief: Do Good Institute, University of Maryland

² Source: Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, [Changes to the Giving Landscape \(iupui.edu\)](#)

³ Source: Duquette, Nicolas, J.: The Evolving Distribution of Giving in the United States, Sept. 11, 2020

The [first two studies](#) in this undertaking have already been published. A study by Stanford University's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, published in 2020, found that people give in ways far beyond volunteering time and financial contributions to charity, and that people are faced with a plethora of choices when it comes to generosity, including providing data and making purchasing decisions. Another study, published just last week and conducted by a group of researchers led by the Urban Institute, reported on individual giving trends to a nationally representative group of nonprofits whose activities range from direct service provision to community building and advocacy, have annual expenses of \$50,000 or more and can be linked to IRS Form 990 data. The study found that individuals are essential for these nonprofits and that approximately three out of four such nonprofits view individual donations as essential or very important for their work,

Additional research results will be forthcoming and will explore the causes of recent trends in volunteering, the relationship between giving and volunteering and other forms of civic behaviors and social connectedness and the relationship between social connectedness and a healthy democracy. Taken as a whole, these studies will examine how generosity can be better understood, how it can be fostered across the U.S. and the extent to which public policy can support and encourage greater generosity.

Another central initiative of the Generosity Commission will be a National Conversation, which will enable people from across the country to share their insights, interests, and stories to inform the overall work of the Generosity Commission. The National Conversation, launching next year, will also provide a channel to communicate about and promote generosity by enabling people to learn from each other and by packaging and disseminating research findings and Generosity Commission insights and recommendations.

The important work of the Generosity Commission will be led by the following Commission Members – a group of diverse, nonpartisan, ideologically balanced leaders across social, public, and private sectors:

- [Jane Wales](#), Chair, the Generosity Commission; Vice President, the [Aspen Institute](#); Founder, Global Philanthropy Forum; former Program Chair, Carnegie Corporation of New York; former Associate Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
- [Marla Blow](#), President & COO, [Skoll Foundation](#); former Senior Vice President for Social Impact in North America, Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth; former Assistant Director for Card and Payment Markets, U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
- [Ann Mei Chang](#), CEO, [Candid](#); Author, *Lean Impact*; Former Chief Innovation Officer, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- [Dr. Cecilia Conrad](#), CEO, Lever for Change; Managing Director, [MacArthur Foundation](#); Emerita Professor, former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean, Pomona College
- [Asha Curran](#), CEO, [Giving Tuesday](#); formerly Chief Innovation Officer and Director, Belfer Center for Innovation & Social Impact at 92nd Street Y
- [Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker](#), President & CEO, [Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo](#); formerly appointed to the White House Council on Service and Civic Participation

- [Heather Templeton Dill](#), President, [John Templeton Foundation](#); Trustee, Philanthropy Roundtable
- [Wendy Guillies](#), President & CEO, [Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](#)
- [Kenneth Hodder](#), National Commander, [Salvation Army](#)
- [Lisa Marsh Ryerson](#), President, [AARP Foundation](#); formerly President and CEO, Wells College
- [Dr. Michael McAfee](#), President & CEO, [PolicyLink](#)
- [Luis Miranda Jr.](#), Founding Partner, [MirRam Group](#); Founding President, [Hispanic Federation](#)
- [Natalye Paquin](#), President & CEO, [Points of Light](#); former Chief Transformation Officer, Girl Scouts of the USA
- [Dr. Eboo Patel](#), author; CEO, [Interfaith Youth Core](#); Served on President Obama's Inaugural Faith Council
- [Valerie Rockefeller](#), Trustee, Chair of the Board of Trustees, [Rockefeller Brothers Fund](#); Co-Chair, BankFWD
- [Rob Rosen](#), Director Philanthropic Partnerships, [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#)
- [Jerre Stead](#), CEO, [Clarivate](#); investor and philanthropist

The Generosity Commission will be supported by a handful of task forces that include leaders with deep expertise in a variety of areas related to giving, volunteering and civic life. They will inform the Commission Members of the state of play in their domains, identify key issues for consideration, areas in need of new research, constituencies to engage, themes to be emphasized in the National Conversation and matters of policy or practice on which the Generosity Commission may choose to express a view.

While research and other findings will be released along the way, the Generosity Commission's work will culminate with the publishing of a report in 2023. This report will include practical recommendations related both to policy and practice across sectors that can enhance giving, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement in America. Following the publishing of this report, the Generosity Commission's work will sunset, and the group will be disbanded.

The work of the Generosity Commission is made possible due to the financial support of an impressive list of individuals and organizations, which can be accessed on the [Generosity Commission website](#).

More information about the Generosity Commission can be found at <https://www.thegenerositycommission.org> and by following @TheGenerosityCommission on Facebook and LinkedIn and @GenerosityComm on Twitter.

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About the Generosity Commission:

The Generosity Commission is a nonpartisan, cross-sector, broadly diverse group designed to bring together a breadth of stakeholders, voices, and expertise to explore profound questions that will shape the future of giving, volunteering and the many forms of civic engagement in America. Through fresh research and by stimulating a national conversation, the Generosity

Commission will celebrate and inspire generosity across America by providing insight into the central role it plays in our society, its shifting nature, and the ways it is being reimagined across generations and communities. For more information, visit

<https://www.thegerositycommission.org/>.