

## FAQ

### **What is the Generosity Commission?**

The Generosity Commission is a nonpartisan group of leaders committed to celebrating and supporting Americans' spirit of generosity as expressed through everyday giving, volunteering, and other forms of civic participation. Launched in October 2021, it is an independent project of Giving USA Foundation™, whose mission is to advance research, education, and public understanding of philanthropy.

Through commissioned research and conversations online and in person, the Generosity Commission will contribute to national understanding about how individual givers and volunteers are reimagining generosity in powerful and positive ways, strengthening our society and democracy in the process.

The Generosity Commission will conclude its work in Spring 2024 with recommendations based on its findings. These recommendations will focus on ways that the business, nonprofit, and policy sectors can support and enable everyday giving and volunteering. Ultimately, the Generosity Commission seeks to foster a culture of individual and collective generosity in the face of the social and economic challenges our society faces today.

### **What is the goal of the Generosity Commission?**

To increase civic participation as demonstrated by the number of “everyday” Americans who give and volunteer -- in whatever way best reflects their individual passions, values, and life circumstances.

### **How is the Generosity Commission advancing that goal?**

*First, the Generosity Commission seeks to understand.* Through commissioned original research, we seek to better understand trends in giving and volunteering—and the impacts on community organizations of those trends. We want to learn what the data shows.

*Second, the Commission will engage everyday givers and volunteers and leaders of institutions.* Americans are expressing their generosity in a wide variety of ways, some traditional, some novel, and some which escape our current tracking practices. Through focus groups, we hope to hear firsthand how Americans describe generosity as they see it and experience it - the barriers they face, the actions they undertake, and their own role in its future. Through testimony and listening sessions, we hope to hear from leaders of nonprofits, foundations and other organizations who engage with givers and volunteers on the opportunities in their fields to further enable everyday giving and volunteering.

*Finally, we will support better ways to engage Americans* from all walks of life by offering practical recommendations for policymakers, business leaders, nonprofit organizations, data aggregators, organized philanthropy, and civil society organizations to inspire and enable everyone to give time and resources.

### **What is your theory of change?**

Individual giving and volunteering are demonstrated to lead to other forms of civic participation, allowing for the kind of active citizenry on which a resilient society and a robust democracy depend.

### **How will the views of the broader community be represented?**

We recognize that the Generosity Commission alone cannot be fully representative. Working in an iterative process with the Commission are four Task Forces (Research, Policy, Faith and Giving, Communications), each filled with a diverse group of members that bring in additional expertise, insight, and guidance to areas of work that are crucial to the success of the Generosity Commission.

To further broaden the perspective of the Generosity Commission, the Commission and Task Force members will take testimony of leaders from all three sectors who influence, observe, or enable everyday givers' acts of generosity. *We will ask them to describe the most important innovations in their fields; the most promising and/or most self-defeating choices made; and any gaps to be filled. Finally, we will ask whether they have a "stretch" idea for the Commission to consider.*

### **Why was the Generosity Commission created?**

The Generosity Commission was born of a concern about the decline in the number of people in America who are giving and volunteering. From 2000 to 2016, year over year, more money was given – but by fewer givers; 20 million households stopped giving to nonprofits over this period. The rates of volunteering also declined to a 15-year low in 2015.

When that many people change long-standing behavior, it is time to ask why. The answers can reveal underlying societal stresses —and important solutions that can strengthen our society.

The Generosity Commission was created to ask those questions and help develop those solutions.

### **What forms of Generosity will the Commission focus on?**

Generosity takes many forms and is expressed in many ways. The Commission is focused on generosity as it is expressed in everyday giving and volunteering, including both giving of time or treasure.

The spectrum of giving and volunteering that is at the heart of the Commission's inquiry includes donations of time, talent, and treasure, whether giving to nonprofit organizations or direct to individuals in need.

### **Where is the Generosity Commission "housed"?**

The Commission is a project of the USA Foundation™, which serves as its fiscal agent. The Commission's initial design was the product of the Generosity Commission Working Group convened by the Giving Institute.

### **How can I stay informed?**

Sign-up for our newsletter and follow our social channels to ensure you are up to date on the latest Generosity Commission news. Please reach out directly to [contact@generositycommission.org](mailto:contact@generositycommission.org) with any additional inquiries.

### **What research is the Generosity Commission pursuing?**

To date we have commissioned four pieces of academic research that examine different aspects of the current trends of giving and volunteering and their connection to civic engagement. A listing of completed research is available on the [Commission's website](#) with a link to individual research reports. Each research institute will publish its research independently.

### **What policies will the Generosity Commission pursue?**

The results of our research and expert testimony will inform the direction of any recommendations we make. We will focus on practical recommendations for each sector to enhance, model and incentivize everyday giving and volunteering.

### **Will political giving play a role in your inquiry?**

Our focus groups will explore the role that political giving and party activism play in Americans' sense of generosity and to what extent this may be replacing giving or volunteering for other charitable causes. We

realize that for many younger Americans there may be a blurring between the two, and we want to better understand that relationship.

### **What is the role of charitable tax deductions?**

While tax policy is not the motivation for why people give, it is important to some donors as it may affect the amount of their giving. We're looking at the broader view of how and why people give. Understanding that will help us see what we can do that will drive real change, whether it's tax policy or something else.

### **How will the Generosity Commission make a difference?**

We will highlight the relevance of generosity in America and its positive impact for people and communities across the country.

Through our research and recommendations, we will help understand how giving and volunteering are changing in America.

We will make informed recommendations about what we're learning and ways to increase the number of people who give time and resources and engage in civic actions, but also to forecast new ways in which we can all make a positive difference.

### **Are fewer Americans giving and volunteering—or do they give and volunteer in different ways?**

Available nonprofit data captures gifts to, and volunteering for, charitable organizations. But we also know that American generosity includes a long-standing tradition of direct giving to friends and strangers, unmediated by charitable organizations, which is not included in these kinds of measures. We also know that in recent years, there has been a burst of online crowdfunding and mutual aid societies, with gifts to individuals as well as organizations, acting rapidly to address immediate needs.

While we know that giving and volunteering to traditional charities have trended down, we are in the midst of learning more about giving and volunteering in more direct ways – how we get our data, what data is available, and how we analyze all of that. Part of our work will be to identify the gaps in the data and recommend what may be needed to know more about changing patterns of giving and volunteering and what issues may be raised with such changes.

### **Are giving and volunteering within everyone's reach?**

We understand that there are many factors that impact one's ability to give and volunteer. Income inequality and financial precarity affect many people, impacting their ability to give and volunteer. We recognize that not everyone has the capacity or resources to give consistently, but we believe that everyone has been and will be generous in their lives. Our hope is that more people understand that their generosity matters, regardless of how and how much they are able to contribute in time, talent or resources.

Our view of generosity is not limited to financial gifts; giving and volunteering encompass civic participation, and the mutual aid that people are providing each other in times of crisis.

Giving and volunteering are pathways to greater civic participation and citizen engagement is essential to our society's capacity to solve shared problems and steward shared resources. Recent shocks like the pandemic, hurricanes and wildfires, rising inflation, and the disproportionate impacts of each on the poor and communities of color call for ever greater engagement.

Large foundations, corporations and governments are trying to leverage all their resources to tackle large problems, and to do so together. But it is the everyday giver who builds social capital, advances citizen agency, and strengthens our communities' capacity to solve. They are central players in the American

experience. The trust they build provides the societal glue on which our unique form of self-governance relies.

The Generosity Commission seeks to explore and shed light on trends in giving and volunteering, to understand the ways in which both are being reimagined nationally and in communities across the country, and to encourage and help enable these and other forms of civic engagement.

#### **What are the sources for the data referenced?**

- Between 2000 and 2016 there were 20 million fewer American households giving to charitable institutions.
  - Source: Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, [Changes to the Giving Landscape](https://www.givinglilly.org/changes-to-the-giving-landscape/) (iupui.edu)
- \$200 Billion value of annual volunteer hours
  - Source: Independent Sector Releases [New Value of Volunteer Time of \\$28.54 Per Hour, April 20, 2021](https://www.independentsector.org/newsroom/new-value-of-volunteer-time-of-28-54-per-hour/)
- The national volunteer rate fell to a 15-year low at about 25% in 2015.
  - 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."](https://www.do-good.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Where%20Are%20America's%20Volunteers%20A%20Look%20at%20America's%20Widespread%20Decline%20in%20Volunteering%20in%20Cities%20and%20States.pdf) Research Brief: Do Good Institute, University of Maryland.

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